

रवि शाक्य, इखाछें, यल

THE CULT OF

KUMARI

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THE CULT OF KUMARI

Virgin worship in Nepal

by

Michael Allen

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Foreword

Dr. Michael Allen (Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney) was affiliated to this Institute between September of 1973 and January 1974 for the purpose of conducting research on 'Society and Religion amongst the Newars of Nepal.' The present monograph is the outcome of this research. Under the rules of affiliation with Tribhuvan University research reports submitted to this Institute may be published if they are deemed useful. Since this is the most comprehensive study yet undertaken on the cult of the Kumari or the 'Virgin Goddess,' the value of this monograph for readers of Nepalese cultural history is quite evident. Dr. Allen has, in this work, succeeded not only in compiling much data on the subject for the first time, but also has tried to show the deep significance of the cult for the socio-religious life of the people of the Kathmandu Valley. The material of the book has also been presented from a sociological angle which gives a fresh approach to the subject. It is hoped that the publication of this work may further the objective of planning future similar studies on the 'living' Nepalese culture. At the end, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Allen for making his excellent study available to the Institute for publication.

Mahanavami,
October 13, 1975

P.R. Sharma
Dean



Plate 1. The royal Kumari at Hanuman Dhoka to greet Panchali Bhatnaga, Oct. 1974

THE CULT OF KUMARI

by

Michael Allen

1. Introduction

The worship of female deities has for long played a most important part in man's religious behaviour. In the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor and the Middle East mother goddesses (Bhattacharya, 1971:6-13) were foremost amongst the deities worshipped, and in many contemporary tribal societies the chief cults focus on such themes as fertility and the power of child-bearing and menstruating women. But it is perhaps above all on the Indian sub-continent that the female principle has received the most explicit recognition. Indirect evidence indicates that mother goddesses occupied a central position in the religions of such ancient civilizations as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (Marshall, 1931, i, 57) and the ancient Sankhya philosophical tradition, which subsequently evolved into Saktism, focussed on the importance of the female principle (prakriti) and its union with the male (purusha). Saktism is still today a popular cult found all over India, and its chief distinguishing feature is the worship of Sakti (Devi) as the supreme deity. Though the most elaborate Hindu temples are those dedicated to the worship of male deities such as Siva, Ganesa, Vishnu and Krishna, far greater attention is paid to the propitiation of less august though more powerful and dangerous female deities. Everywhere one finds that daily offerings are made to the small and frequently inconspicuous shrines of the presiding mother goddess of the locality, and there are few areas in which the goddess of smallpox is not greatly feared and worshipped.

Amongst the Newars of Nepal, the numerically dominant ethnic group of Kathmandu valley, the influence of Tantricism on both Hinduism and Buddhism has ensured the importance both of sexuality and the worship of Sakti. In addition to the popularity of such non-Tantric female deities as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati, the Newars devote a great deal of their ritual activity to the worship of the Devi in one of her many dangerous, mature and bloodlusting forms (Kali, Durga, Ajima, Bhairavi, Taleju etc.). But the most notable and perhaps unique feature of their religion is the prominence given to the worship of Kumari, the living virgin goddess. In this book I give an outline of the main features of her cult.¹

Historical notes

Kumari-puja, or 'virgin worship', is a feature of Hinduism of the greatest antiquity dating back at least to the late Vedic period. The earliest known reference occurs in the Taittiriya Aranyaka, a seventh or sixth century B.C. text, in which the Sakti ('divine energy' or 'female creative principle') is addressed as Kanyakumari (Sastri, 1967:14). Bhattacharya (1971:104) commenting on the same text records in a footnote (23) that Rudra's spouse Ambika is invoked as Kanyakumari. This particular name of the deity is especially associated with south India where there is both a temple and a district called by the same name. The temple,² which is still revered by Hindus throughout India, is at the southernmost tip of the sub-continent on Cape Comorin, a name which is itself derived from Kumari (Yule, Book III, 382-5). The antiquity of the deity is evident in that a Greek sea captain noted in about 60 A.D. that "Beyond this there is another place called Comari, at which are the Cape of Comari and a harbor; hither come those men who wish to consecrate themselves for the rest of their lives, and bathe and dwell in celibacy; and women also do the same; for it is told that a goddess once dwelt here and bathed" (Schoff, 1912: 46). About 70 years later the geographer Ptolemy referred to the cape as "Comaria Akron".

In the Mahabharata, parts of which may date back to the Vedic period, Kumari is given as one of the many names of Sakti or Devi, and in the Devi-Mahatmya, a Purana of about the fourth century A.D., there are many references to Kaumari as one of the seven mother-goddesses (Agrawala, 1963:105,111,121,133). Both Atkinson (1974:801) and Woodroffe (1973:110) note that in the latter text she is again especially identified with Ambika, the 'little mother'.

Though I have no firm evidence for the assertion, it seems likely that some form of Kumari worship has existed in Nepal for a very long time - possibly as long as in India. The Nepalese Chronicles (Vamsavalis), though of limited value as historical records, represent the goddess as dating back at least as far as the sixth century A.D. Padmagiri (Hasrat, 1970:41) noted that "Sivadeva also built a city on the four crossroads which was named Naubali, and in which were formally placed the images of the following deities and their respective vahanas or carriages, and ganas or followers: 4 Ganes, 4 Bhairava, 4 Nrityanath, 4 Mahadeva, 4 Kumari, 4 Khandita-Buddhas, 4 Khamba, 4 Gaganachari, (see also Wright, 1877:125). Again he recorded that "He (Sivadeva) constituted a yatra to the goddess Vajresvari which takes place annually on Phalgun-Badi Dvadsī or Trayodasi (or 13th) when the Kumaris or Virgins are feasted and on the Chaturdasi (14th) of the same month is performed the ceremony of the Rathayatra while fires are kindled before the images of Mahadeva throughout the city". The date of Sivadeva is still controversial with some chronicles placing him two names earlier than Amsuvarma (regnal dates circa 568-616

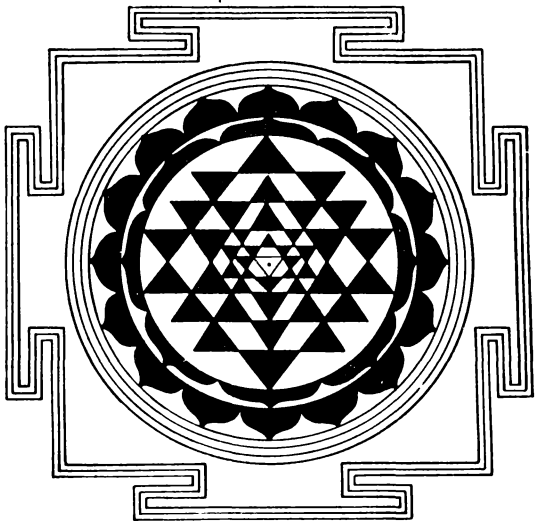


Plate 2. The Sri yantra or Sri cakra. The design as a whole represents sakti, the divine power which motivates the universe and is essentially female. I quote from Tucci (1969,46-7):" such mandalas are made by four isosceles triangles with the apices upwards, and by five others with the apices downwards; they are of various sizes and they intersect one another. In the middle is a point, the bindu, the mysterious matrix". The five downward facing triangles are usually taken to indicate the five aspects of Sakti while the four upward pointing ones symbolize Siva. The eight surrounding petals symbolize the lotus of creation.

A.D.) and others as overlapping with that ruler. Pal (1970:3) on the seemingly strong grounds of an inscription dated 598 A.D., takes the latter approach. Hasrat (42) also notes that Vasudeva, a king who in most chronicles is placed three names after Sīvādēva, installed near Devī Jayavagesvari images of Kumari Gana and Nau Durgā.

Thus far the evidence points solely to the existence of a goddess called Kumari; there is no information at all concerning the nature of her worship. Wright's Vamsavali (1972:157) provides a clue to the possible origin of the unique practice of worshipping young girls as living Kumaris. The author records that Lakshmikamadeva, a Raja of Kantipur who reigned from about 1024-40 A.D.,

"thinking that his grandfather had acquired so much wealth and conquered the four quarters of the world through the aid of the Kumaris, resolved to do the same. With this intention he went to the Patan Durbar, and having worshipped as Kumari the daughter of a bandya (Sakya caste), living in a bihar near the Durbar, known by the name of Lakshmi-barman, he erected an image of Kumari and established the Kumari puja."

This reference is of particular interest for the Sanskrit name of the baha from which the present Patan Kumari is selected is Lakshmikalyan-gavarnasankaritanakaramahavihara. It was built by Lakshmikamadeva in Haka locality immediately adjacent to the place, but was subsequently moved to its present location in Gahbahal tol when the palace was enlarged in the seventeenth century. If the evidence of the Vamsavalis is to be believed it appears that the Patan royal Kumari is of greater antiquity than her more famous Kathmandu counterpart. Indeed, Lakshmikamadeva predates by almost two centuries the introduction to Nepal of Taleju Bhavani, the lineage deity of the Malla dynasty who is commonly believed to be incarnate in the living Kumari. Lakshmikamadeva is also credited with having begun a number of important festivals, including Indrajaatra, which today incorporates the spectacular chariot festival (rathajatra) of the Kathmandu royal Kumari (Sharma, 1971:109).

The importance that Lakshmikamadeva attached to the worship of Kumari may well be related to the growing popularity of Tantricism, both of the Hindu and Buddhist varieties, throughout north India and Nepal during the eleventh century. The fact that he selected a Sakya (Buddhist) girl as the living Kumari could be due to the influence of Atisa, the great Indian mystic who is commonly accredited with having introduced Vajrayana Buddhism into Nepal towards the end of the Raja's reign (Regmi, 1965, Part 1:121-2).

The earliest known colophon inscriptions in which references are made to Kumari both occur during the reign of Ananta Malla in the late thirteenth century. They are listed in Petech (1958, ms 3 on p. 95 and

ms 12 on p. 97), the first entitled Kaumari puja and dated April, 30, 1280 A.D. and the second as Kumari puja vidhana (vidhana means 'rules' or 'regulations') and dated November 24, 1285 A.D. I have not as yet had the opportunity to translate these inscriptions, though it is evident that the King himself performed both pujas.³

An important event in the development of the Kumari cult occurred about 1323 A.D.⁴ when Hari Singh Deva brought the goddess Taleju Bhavani from Simraongadh to Bhaktapur. From that date Taleju has been recognised as foremost amongst the nations deities. According to the Vamsavalis, Hari Singh Deva, a King of the Karnatak dynasty from Ayodhya in north India, was ruling in Simraongadh when Gayasuddin Tughlak Shah invaded the city. Hari Singh fled to Nepal. Some authorities say that he became King of Bhaktapur, though possibly only for a year after which he returned to Simraongadh; others that he remained for many years as King, and yet others that he never actually ascended the throne. All, however, are agreed that he brought his family deity, Taleju Bhavani, with him. Wright's Vamsavali (106) refers to Taleju (given here as Turja Bhavani) as the principle goddess of Amarapur in central India,⁵ and then gives examples of her great influence and power as the presiding deity of Bhaktapur. In one long story, given to me orally but said to be based on a Vamsavali, Taleju is said to be the Devi who figures prominently in the Ramayana as having first supported Ravana in Sri Lanka but later gave her support to Rama Chandra. Rama, having defeated Ravana, took the Devi in the form of a sri yantra (plate 2), to his capital Ayodhya in north India where he worshipped her as his agama deity. The tale then describes how the yantra continued to be worshipped by king after king, until Hari Singh Deva first brought it to Simraongadh and subsequently to Bhaktapur. (See Wright, 105-8 and Singh, 1968:205-6).

Taleju has continued to be regarded as the chief protective deity of Nepalese kings right up to the present day. When new capitals were established the first act of the founder was to build a temple for Taleju, and on numerous occasions recently-installed kings either built her a new temple or carried out major renovations. The Vamsavalis frequently refer to the importance of the goddesses mantra as a mark of legitimate succession to the throne - rulers who failed to receive the mantra were regarded as liable to lose their kingdoms.

When Hari Singh Deva introduced the cult there was only one kingdom in the valley, and it was not until after Yaksha Malla made a tripartite division in the early fifteenth century, that first the Kantipur (Kathmandu) and then the Patan (Lalitpur) temples were built. Ratna Malla, the son of Yaksha Malla who reigned in Kantipur built a small Taleju temple in A.D. 1501 (Wright, 202) though it was not until 1549 that Mahendra Malla built a substantial three-tiered temple on the site of the present building (plate 3). The Patan Taleju temple was built by Siddhinarasinh in A.D. 1620 (Wright, 233 and Hasrat, 67).



Plate 3. Taleju temple, Kathmandu.

The establishment of the Taleju cult is of importance because each of the principal Kumaris in the three cities of Bhadgaon, Kathmandu and Patan are still today regarded as living manifestations of Taleju. In each city there are numerous tales, some recorded in Vamsavalis and other transmitted orally, in which a king of that city is represented as having so offended Taleju that she refused to have anything further to do with him directly but instead would maintain contact in the form of a young virgin of the Sakya caste. These tales are invariably recited whenever enquiries are made regarding the origin of the Kumari cult, and because most research has focussed on the Kathmandu royal Kumari, the relevant king, Jayaprakasa Malla, is generally credited with having established the custom. However, in a number of published versions (Hasrat, 59-60, Shrestha and Singh, 1972, 29 and Niloufer) the initiating king is said to be Trailokya Malla, a monarch of a then undivided kingdom who reigned at Bhaktapur from about A.D. 1560 to 1613. As in most of the Jayaprakasa tales, the king is represented as maintaining intimate contact with his tutelary deity by playing tripasa (a game in which three dice are thrown on a board) with her. One day the king's daughter intruded on them which apparently so upset the goddess that when the king next dreamed of her she informed him 'that henceforth he would never get a sight of her nor be allowed to have conference with her. But said the goddess: "I will present myself in the form of some girl of high caste".⁶ Accordingly the Rajah caused a Bandy girl to be worshipped by the name of Kumari or virgin, which custom is still extant to this day.' (Hasrat, 60)

It is of some interest to note that in Wright's Vamsavali (207) Mahendra Malla, the Kathmandu king who built a large Taleju temple, is said to have lived for some time in Bhaktapur with Trailokya Malla where he worshipped Taleju daily. The goddess is said to have been pleased with his attentions and directed him to build a temple for her at his durbar.

A similar tale (see pp. 33-5) focussing on the dice game and subsequent retreat of the goddess into the form of a Sakya girl is told in Patan, though here the relevant monarch is said to be either Siddhinarasingsh, the seventeenth century monarch who built the first Taleju temple, or his son Srinivas Malla. My chief Patan informant, a learned Deo-Brahman who is a direct descendant of Biswanath (Wright, 233) the famous Guru of Siddhinarasingsh, stated that from his understanding of a number of Vamsavalis, it was Siddhinarasingsh who first brought Taleju to Patan and built her a temple, and that it was during the reign of his son Srinivas Malla that she became Kumari. However, when my informant gave me the story of the dice game the monarch mentioned was Siddhinarasingsh.

The similarity of the many versions of the dice-game story, though of importance for an understanding of some fundamental features of Kumari worship, nevertheless precludes the possibility of any firm statement regarding the origin of the goddess's associations with Taleju. The most

that may be said is that it occurred in all three Malla Kingdoms, possibly beginning in Bhaktapur in the late sixteenth century and ending in Kathmandu in the mid-eighteenth. Just why it should have occurred is by no means clear, though it seems possible that it may reflect a desire of the Malla kings to give their lineage deity increased legitimacy through association with the long established and much-revered Kumari. All of the stories portray the relevant king as having lost favour with his protecting deity, a feature which may reflect some weakness in his position. The reappearance of Taleju as Kumari in the form of a Sakya girl had the important political result of projecting the source of legitimacy outside the palace. This feature of the cult gained in importance when the Gurkhas conquered the Mallas and they too found it desirable to acknowledge the legitimating function of the Sakya Kumari of Kathmandu.

Living Kumaris

Most authors who discuss the Kumari cult convey the impression that there is only one girl in Nepal who is worshipped as a living form of the goddess - the royal Kumari of Kathmandu at Basantapur. That this is not so is evident from Moaven's recent paper (1974) in which she discussed eight individual cases, and I have been able to gather information about a total of eleven. There are also a number of Gana Kumaris, groups of young girls collectively worshipped on special occasions. The goddess exists in the form of images in temples known as Bala Kumari and at innumerable small shrines (pitha) consisting of five stones said to be the Pancha Kumari. There are major differences amongst the living forms according to such variables as the girl's caste membership, who worships her and what attributes of the goddess are most stressed. The caste variation is of particular interest for though the Taleju dice-playing origin tales represent the goddess as taking her Kumari form in Sakya girl, only six of the present incumbents are of this caste with another five from the Vajracharya and two from the Jyapu. Though there seems to be a particularly close connection between Sakya, Taleju and royalty: it is not exclusive for the ex-royal Kumari of Patan is selected from a Vajracharya community. The other four Vajracharya Kumaris have a more Tantric and Buddhist character than their Sakya counter-parts, and are more closely associated with the Vajrayana deity Vajradevi than with the Hindu Taleju. The Jyapu Kumaris are worshipped as agama deities by the Pradhans and Deo-Brahmans, high-ranking Newar Hindu castes. The full list of eleven is as follows:

Kathmandu

1. The Raj (royal) or Lakhu (palace) Kumari. Sakya caste and worshipped by King and nation.
2. Mu (chief) Kumari. Vajracharya caste of Mubaha worshipped mostly by members of her own caste in central (Datu) Kathmandu.

3. Kwabaha Kumari. Vajracharya caste of Kwabaha worshipped both by members of her own caste in north (Thane) Kathmandu and by the Pradhans of Bhagawan Baha in Thambahi locality.
4. Kilagar Kumari. Jyapu caste and worshipped primarily by the Pradhans of Kilagar-Itumbaha area.

Patan

5. The ex-royal Kumari of Hawbaha in Gahbaha locality. Vajracharya caste and worshipped by most Patan residents and also by a number of individuals, not exclusively Newar, from elsewhere.
6. Sonimha Kumari. Jyapu caste of Mikhabaha worshipped by Deo-Brahmans of that locality.

Bhaktapur

7. Ekanta Kumari. She can be chosen from any of the bahas of Bhaktapur and may be of either Vajracharya or Sakya castes. Her official residence is in Dipankar Baha and in the past she was worshipped by the Malla Kings of Bhaktapur. Today she is publicly worshipped by most of the population of Bhaktapur during Dasain, and is available for private clients on request.
8. Wala Lakhu Kumari. Selection as with the Ekanta Kumari but she is especially associated with Wala Lakhu, a baha-like courtyard near Dattatreya temple where she has her agama. Worshipped only during Dasain.
9. Tebuk che Kumari. As with all of the Bhaktapur Kumaris she can be selected from any of the Vajracharya or Sakya families. Worshipped only during Dasain, most especially by the Jyapus of Tebuk locality.

Devapatan

10. Chabahi Kumari. Sakya caste of Suvarnapurnamaha-vihara (Chabahi). Supposedly long ago worshipped by the Kings of Devapatan. Today her worship is mostly confined to the members of her own bahi, though a few individual worshippers from elsewhere also seek her.

Bungamati

11. She is chosen from a single patrilineal extended family (kawa) of Vajracharya members of Bungabaha. Worshipped by members of most Bungamati castes - especially in connection with their famous god Matsyendranath.

2. The Royal and Ex-Royal Kumaris

Kathmandu

When the Gurkhas conquered the valley just over two centuries ago they made Kathmandu their capital and hence paid great attention both to the local Taleju Bhavani and to her living manifestation as the Basantapur Kumari. Virtually every history textbook in the country recounts how, when Prithvinarayan Shah entered Kathmandu during the annual Kumari festival, he first received prasad from the goddess and then decreed that the festival should continue. It is this event that above all is represented as conferring legitimacy on the new dynasty - a symbolic act of great importance still repeated annually when the King comes to receive his tika from Kumari. As a result of this continuing royal patronage she is today one of the foremost of Nepalese divinities, while her counterparts in Patan and Bhaktapur have sunk into relative oblivion.

According to the Vamsavalis it was Jayaprakasa, the last of the Malla Kings of Kathmandu, who instituted the royal worship of Kumari. Though some element of doubt must remain as to whether some of his predecessors may also have done likewise, it is certain that it was Jayaprakasa who first built her an official residence near the palace and also began the annual chariot festival. There is indeed much evidence to suggest that as Jayaprakasa became increasingly apprehensive about the growing Gurkha threat he turned more and more to the propitiation of Taleju and other female deities in the belief that they conferred great power on King and State.

Those eligible to be chosen as Kumari are the daughters of all male Sakyas who have membership of a Kathmandu baha. Since baha membership is both hereditary in the male line and confirmed by formal initiation as a young boy, Sakyas who have come from outside Kathmandu to settle in the town cannot, even after many generations, offer their daughters for selection. Also excluded are the daughters of those Sakyas who are members of bahis. Bahis are mostly located on the outskirts of town and their members, though they freely inter-marry and inter-dine with other Sakyas, are regarded as of slightly inferior status. The present Kumari's family live at Ombaha in Jor Ganesa locality in downtown Kathmandu, and her father is a member of Bikama Baha (Viswokarmavihara) in the same locality. The two previous incumbents were from Nagha tol in the north and many others have come from Ombaha, Ciram Baha and Tahram Baha in central Kathmandu near Indra Chowk, Sikhamu Baha immediately beside Kumari che, and Lagan Baha in downtown.

Sikhamu Baha, in addition to a high incidence of girls selected from its membership, is closely linked to the goddess in its role as provider of four of the Pancha Buddha. The Pancha Buddha (plate 4) are five Buddhist priests of Vajracharya caste who officiate during the annual



Plate 4. The Pancha Buddha (five Vajracharya priests) on the first day of Kumari Jatra, October 1974.

Kumari jatra and have various other ceremonial duties in connection with the goddess. They consist of two Raj Gubhajas, one from Sikhamu Baha and the other from Saval Baha in central Kathmandu and three other Gubhajas of Sikhamu. The Raj Gubhajas hold hereditary positions that date back to the Malla period when they carried the authority of the King to settle disputes amongst the Newar Buddhists and to carry out a number of ritual duties. Even today such disputes, mostly over rights to clients, are commonly heard by the 18 baha heads in a large meeting room on the top floor of Kumari che.⁷ The Sikhamu Raj Gubhaju is the seniormost member of an agnatic lineage that currently has about 74 male members, most of whom reside at Rajkirtimahavihara in Maru tol. It is this Gubhaju who is most especially important in connection with Kumari, for in addition to the performance of both daily and special pujas in her agama, he plays a prominent part in the selection and installation of new Kumaris. He also personally selects as the three additional Pancha Buddhas whichever of his baha's members he regards as suitable. One of these three also acts as his assistant (upadhya) in performing puja at Kumari che.

As soon as a reigning Kumari gives evidence, through one of the disqualifying signs, that the spirit of the goddess is deserting her, her attendant (Kumarima) must report the matter to the Bada Guruju, a Parbatiya Brahmin who holds a palace appointment as legal adviser on religious matters. The priest informs the King and having gained his assent he then asks the royal astrologer to determine an auspicious day for the selection of a new Kumari. When the date has been selected, usually about a month prior to Dasain, the news is sent to the Pancha Buddha who in turn inform the elders of the bahas with eligible girls. The selection committee consists of the Bada Guruju, the Acahuju priest (see pp. 38-39 and note 10) of Taleju temple, the Pancha Buddha and the royal astrologer. They examine the girls in a room in Hanuman Dhoka, supposedly using the list of 32 perfections⁸ found in goddesses, but almost certainly basing their judgement on a much simpler and shorter list. The features most frequently mentioned include the following: perfect health with no serious illness, especially smallpox, having occurred, skin without blemish, black hair and eyes, no bad body smells, pre-menstrual, and no loss of teeth. Though a new-born baby could meet all of these requirements, it is usual to select a girl who has been weaned and can walk; indeed, some are of the opinion that she must be at least two years old. No doubt an unweaned child separated from its mother would not only pose practical problems, but also be most unlikely to behave with the composure required of a Kumari. The child is also required to walk on certain formal occasions, including her installation ceremony. In addition to the physical signs, the members of the selection committee are expected to consider such matters as her personality, which should show signs both of calmness and fearlessness, and the general reputation, especially in terms of piety, of her family. The practical irrelevance of the formal list of 32 perfections is evident in that many of them could be found only in a mature woman; for example, the forty

teeth (the fallen milk teeth plus the full adult set), cheeks like a lion or body like a banyan tree. Indeed, it is evident that the list applies to Kumari in her true or inner form as a fully mature woman - a theme to which I will subsequently return.

If the committee finds that all of the candidates display some undesirable feature, a not uncommon occurrence, they simply hope for the best by naming the girl who comes closest to the ideal. At this point the astrologer examines the successful girl's horoscope to check that it is not only generally favourable but that it in no way clashes with that of the King. Having passed this important test the Rada Guruju brings her to the palace where the King offers her a coin.

She now returns to her home where she stays until the final tests occur and the formal rites of installation are performed. During this interregnum the spirit of Kumari is believed to be already slowly entering the girl so that if she is in any way unsuitable her body is certain to react negatively during the three or four week period.

Maha astami, the 'great eighth' day of Dasain, celebrates the slaying of the demon Mahisasura by Durga. On kalratrī (see pp. 20-21) the 'black night' hundreds of buffaloes, goats, sheep, chickens and ducks are sacrificed at Bhagawati, Durga, Taleju and other mother goddess temples throughout the country. It is, however, most especially in Mulchowk, (plates 5) the small inner courtyard in Hanuman Dhoka that leads to the adjacent Taleju temple, that Durga's triumph is re-enacted. At nightfall eight buffaloes representing the demon are tied to poles around the edge of the courtyard and killed by having their throats slit so that the blood jets high towards the Bhagawati shrine. A few hours later at about midnight a further one hundred and eight buffaloes together with goats are killed in Mulchowk. A short while later the little Kumari-elect is brought to the entrance for her final test and installation. The buffalo heads, with lighted wicks between the horns, have been placed in rows across the courtyard, and the selection committee waits on an upstairs verandah. The girl then enters, supposedly by herself, but probably with someone to guide her, and is required to walk clockwise around the raised edge of the courtyard until she reaches the shrine of the terrible eight-armed goddess. She must enter this shrine, still maintaining a perfectly calm demeanour, and if all is well the Taleju Acahju and his assistant priests take her to the first floor where they enter the agama for the installation ceremony. The agama deity is in the form of a sacred water pot (kalasa) with the female triangular sign painted on its top.

I could not obtain a description of the ritual of installation, though there are good reasons to believe that it must be similar to that performed at the installation of the Patan Kumari- which I describe

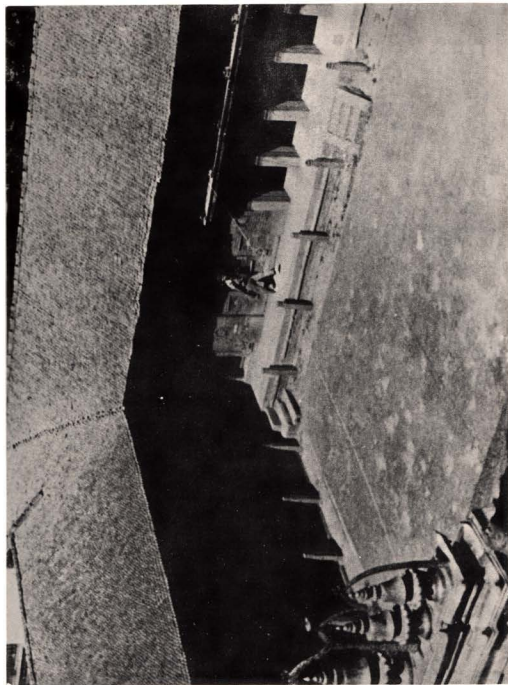


Plate 5. Mulchowk in Hanuman Dhoka palace, Kathmandu.

on pp. 22-23. If so, then it essentially consists of a removal of all past experience from the girl's body so that it becomes a perfectly pure vessel for the spirit of the goddess to enter. This occurs slowly throughout the ritual, but does not reach its climax until the girl is fully made-up as Kumari with appropriate hair-do, tika mark, third-eye, red clothes, red-painted toes, and elaborate jewelry, and then finally takes her seat on her throne. The ritual must take a long time for the new Kumari does not leave Hanuman Dhoka until about four or five in the morning. A big crowd greets her and she then walks on a white cloth across the public square to her official residence.

Thus far proceedings have been entirely in the hands of the Hindu Acahju priests. The girl has become Taleju (Durga) in the form of Kumari and as a sign she carries Taleju's sword of power. When she reaches her house she is met by the Pancha Buddha who conduct her to the first floor agama where they worship her as Vajradevi, the chief female Tantric divinity of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Once installed the girl remains as Kumari until she shows some clear sign that she is human rather than divine. The most certain indication is loss of blood, which may be provoked by loss of tooth, first menstruation, a wound, or internal haemorrhage. Serious illnesses, especially smallpox, also result in disqualification. The girls mostly remain in office about five or six years with loss of tooth the most commonly mentioned disqualification. Though some informants spoke as though the loss of the tooth was itself the causative factor, others stressed that it could be overlooked if there was little or no bleeding.

One ex-Kumari, a 56 year old grandmother who was in office for ten years from the ages of three to thirteen, told me that in her case no negative sign appeared while still Kumari. She was finally dismissed, falsely she claims, on the grounds of suspected menstruation. She admitted that she had lost most of her first teeth, but in each case the new tooth was already well advanced so that there was neither loss of blood nor noticeable gap. This was deemed to be in keeping with her divine nature. Another Kathmandu ex-royal Kumari, now aged about 45, stayed in office until she was 16, and the present Patan incumbent is about 20. (See p. 26)

After the installation of a new Kumari, the old is required to remain indoors in her parents' home for four days during which people may come to worship her. The members of her family look after her and on the fourth day two Jyapu women come to take down her hair and do a last puja. She then removes all of her Kumari clothing and jewelry. She keeps a few of the simpler garments but all of the valuable items must be returned to the care of the Kumarima. She is now regarded as an ordinary member of the family and can commence school and other routine activities.

There were, and to a degree still are, superstitions as regards the marriage prospects of ex-Kumaris. The girls are believed to retain something of the divine power of the goddess and some believe that this can prove dangerous, perhaps even fatal, to their husbands. Even those who do not credit the girls with any unusual or supernatural power are quick to point out that their husbands may have trouble coping with wives who have been so powerful as children. Indeed, there can be little doubt that a girl who has spent some years as the focus of male veneration and fear, and who has come to expect her every whim satisfied, must experience considerable difficulty in accepting the role of the humble wife who daily worships her husband. Clearly, the older the girl when she ceases to be Kumari, the greater the likelihood of marital difficulties. Though I have little data on the subsequent careers of ex-royal Kumaris, there is general belief that they experience some difficulty. Some are said to have become prostitutes in India, others widowed at an early age with subsequent ill-fame, and some too have married men of castes lower than themselves. On the recommendation of the present Kumari, the government recently instituted a monthly payment of 60 rupees (\$6) to ex-Kumaris until such time that they marry and then a down payment of 1,500 rupees (\$150). This action is based on the belief that the marriage prospects of the girls are not as good as they might be. According to Moaven all ex-Kumaris, together with their parents, gather each year during Indra jatra at Basantapur where a feast is prepared for them by members of the Kumari guthi.

During her period in office the little girl is continuously regarded and treated as a goddess. She leaves her family home and takes up residence in Kumari che - an imposing building constructed in the courtyard style of the baha but without a pagoda roof over the main shrine (plate 6). It is a three-storied building with the shrine of the deity located on the south side. On the ground floor is the baha-type Sakyamuni Buddha together with some storage areas; the second floor consists of Kumari's private quarters and public reception and worshipping areas (diagram 1). Her imposing chariot (ratha) is stored in a separate building adjacent to the main structure, much as garages are located beside modern suburban dwellings. Kumari does not normally enter the agama. When one of the Pancha Buddha enters each morning to do nitya puja to Vajradevi, Kumari remains outside. She only enters on special occasions as when a highly Tantric form of Kumari puja is performed. An important agama puja which she is required to attend is disi puja which is performed twice a year at the summer and winter solstices.

As noted previously, the Vamsavalis credit Jayaprakasa Malla with the building of Kumari che. It is a beautiful building with lavish wood-carving on its windows, balconies and doorways. There are numerous carvings of Durga on the tympanums (torana), which is alone sufficient to establish the equivalence between the young pre-menstrual virgin and

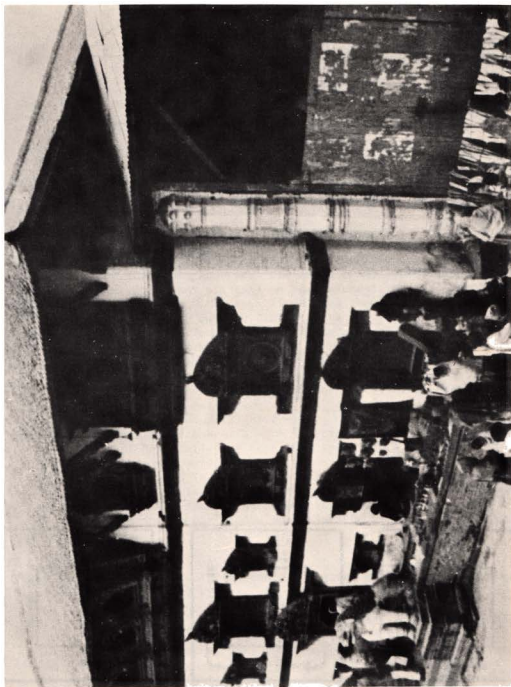
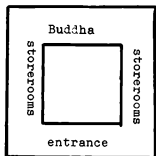
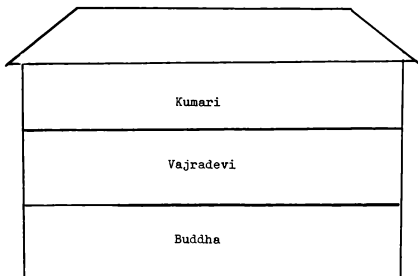
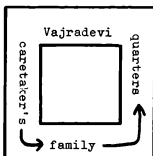


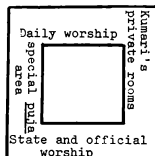
Plate 6. Kumari's house(che), Kathmandu



First floor



Second floor



Third floor

Diagram 1. Kumari's house, Kathmandu.

the beautiful and mature mother-goddess. Another notable feature is some very fine peacock windows - the bird has for long been recognised as the mount both of Kumari the virgin and Kumara the warrior bachelor prince.

Indramaya, the present Kumarima, has been in office for some fifty years, a position which she inherited from her husband's father who in turn succeeded his sister Beti Maya and her mother Pancha Lakshmi. Up to the time of Pancha Lakshmi there had been no fixed rule as to who should look after Kumari and it seems that the mother of one of the girls lodged a petition with the government claiming that she should have the right to look after her daughter. She lost the case and the Rana Maharaja gave Pancha Lakshmi a lal mohar (a legal document from the palace) making the job hereditary in her family.

Indramaya has a large family - four married sons, their wives and a large number of grandchildren. They all live in Kumari che and they assist the old lady in looking after and entertaining the goddess. Each morning one of the women must wash and dress Kumari, fix her hair in the top-knot style, paint her big tika on her forehead, attach her third-eye, paint her eye surrounds with black lines, and then take her to her lion throne (singh asana) for daily worship (nitya puja). This is done by the Achaju priest of Taleju Temple. He performs a simple purificatory rite called panchabahara puja which consists of an offering of five things each of which cleanses one of the five sensory organs, flour (swa) for the ear, rice (jaki) for the mouth, a lamp (mata) for the eye, incense (dun) for the nose and red powder (sina) for touch. The priest is accompanied by a female palace worker (lakhini) who gives Kumari her first food (rice, egg and curd) of the day. She had previously offered the same food to Taleju Bhavani. The Kumarima herself and perhaps some other members of her family may then worship her in a simple manner by offering sweets and flowers. The Raj Gubhaju may also come about this time, but though he too is likely to worship Kumari in some simple manner, his chief duty is to enter the agama and worship the image of Cakra Samvara and Vajradevi. In the evening the Raj Gubhaju makes a simple lamp offering to the Buddha on the ground floor, Vajradevi in the agama and Kumari on her throne.

The Kumarima is responsible for all of the arrangements that are required in connection with the goddess' formal commitments. She makes appointments for private clients who wish to worship her, either in their own homes or in Kumari che, and prior to all such events she must ensure that the girl is wearing the correct clothes, jewelry that are insignia. Her reward is substantial for she has a right to everything offered to the goddess other than such durable items as clothes or jewelry that are intended to become part of the inherited assets of the institution. In addition to the flow of offerings from worshippers there are today additional contributions made by tourists hoping to gain a glimpse of the beautiful little girl in her window.

Kumari's daily routine consists of some two to three hours sitting on her throne for visitors to worship her, playing with the grandchildren of her caretaker, and standing at her window for the benefit of foreign tourists. Ten to twelve devotees worship her each day. There are no formal requirements for the method of worship; some come with a simple plate of offerings in the normal manner of worshipping a temple deity, others make more elaborate offerings and recite texts and yet others employ a priest to conduct a major ceremony. Devotees come from a wide spectrum of Nepalese society ranging from peasants to prominent government members. Though all living Kumaris are selected from Newar Buddhist castes, the worshippers of the royal Kumari include large numbers of Parbatiya Hindus, especially Chetris and Brahmins.

When Kumari sits on her throne for worship she may be offered and accept any kind of food or drink, including meat, spices or alcohol. By sitting on the divine seat with its powerful sri yantra mandala drawn on it she is fully identified with the goddess and hence has great power. But in the ordinary routine of daily life something of this power deserts her - though still the goddess she is also in part just her own human self with accompanying weaknesses. Hence in her daily eating she is, especially if young, likely to be protected from possible danger by restricting her diet to only unspiced food (satwik bhojan) - special care being taken to avoid garlic, onion, spices and alcohol. She is not permitted to risk pollution by walking on the ground, a requirement which is usually met by carrying her whenever she goes outside the house. But on the grand occasion of her annual festival she is especially honoured by having a sheet of white cloth on which to walk from her house to her chariot. She must always wear red clothes, simple cotton for everyday and brocade for special events, her hair must be brushed up in a bundle on top of her head in a style called fakhe sanpho, and she has the third eye (agni chakchhu or 'fire eye') on her forehead, and wears a gold bracelet. These things are sufficient for ordinary daily worship, but for any special puja performed in her house and also for all outside appointments she wears a selection from her large collection of jewelry and decorations (see Moaven for a detailed list). When she sits on her throne she should not speak though she can indicate assent or dissent by head movements.

Because she is a goddess she is expected to act in accordance with her own wishes, and there can be little doubt that her attendants are at times obliged to cope with a fair degree of capricious behaviour. When a private individual wishes to do puja he must first seek audience, then after making an offering ask her permission. If she refuses there is nothing he can do other than perhaps try again some other day. I was also told that if her playmates do not obey her they are punished. There are, however, fairly narrow limits of permissible caprice for if the girl should consistently act in a manner that might be regarded as inappropriate for a goddess then either the Kumari or one of the priests

might declare her unfit and begin to search for a new incumbent. A further consequence of her status as a goddess is that she is expected to be omniscient and cannot therefore be given any kind of formal instruction or training. Though perhaps traditionally this was no great disadvantage to the girl in her later life, it is today recognised that it can be a serious handicap. I was told that she does, in fact, get a certain amount of instruction in reading and writing. She is called deo meiju (goddess lady) and never by her personal name. It is also said that if one should look into either her eyes or the window of her house which is kept especially for her, then one can expect either vomiting or bleeding. Women suffering from either excessive menstrual bleeding or from a miscarriage are said to have had the evil eye of Kumari and must make offerings to her.

The belief that Kumari is really Taleju and hence the chief protectress of the State ensures that both King and politicians are foremost amongst her worshippers. The King, in order to show that he owes his power to the goddess, comes to worship her on the last day of Indra jatra. The importance of this act of symbolic legitimisation is evident in the many tales in which some irregularity is said to have been followed by a change of ruler or even dynasty. Anderson (1971:135) recounts how it is widely told that in 1955 the goddess, who seemed to be dozing, wrongly placed the tika on the Crown Prince rather than the King—eight months later King Tribhuvan died and the Crown Prince Mahendra became King. When a new King comes to the throne he should pay homage to Kumari during the coronation.

Politicians worship the goddess in the hope that their careers will prosper. But foremost amongst her daily worshippers are those who suffer from haemorrhage, especially when there is any bleeding from the mouth or nose. A third category consists of those who have recently participated in a ceremony in which it is regarded as desirable to conclude with Kumari puja. This is especially true of such pre-marital rites as the Hindu brata bhandha (first hair cutting); the Buddhist bare cuigu (initiation into symbolic monkhood) and marriage itself. In this context Kumari puja has the important function of freeing participants from ritual restrictions and taboos. A somewhat different category are those who wish to perform a complex Hindu or Buddhist tantric ritual in which Kumari worship is a required component. However, because such rituals normally require the girl to be absent from her house for long periods, only a few of the wealthiest and most influential persons succeed in gaining the assent of the royal Kumari. The lesser Kumaris, especially those of Vajracharya caste, are those most commonly asked to attend private functions outside their own homes or temples.

The presence of the royal Kumari is required at a number of important festivals during the year.

1. On the evening of the eighth day of the waxing moon in late December or early January, Seto Matsyendranath, the highly popular small white god of compassion, is taken from his shrine in a central Kathmandu baha (Jana Baha or Kanakacaityamahavihara), stripped of all his clothes and jewelry, and then washed by having large vases of water emptied over his head. This impressive purificatory rite takes place on a raised platform in a corner of the baha courtyard with a large and excited crowd of onlookers. Shortly before the god is carried from shrine to platform the royal Kumari is carried into the courtyard on the shoulder of a male attendant and placed on a seat at the corner of the temple verandah. From here she can view the washing of Matsyendranath and also receive the offerings and homage of those who choose to take the opportunity. Though most of the crowd ignore her through their interest in the main action, a steady stream of individuals worship her during the half hour or so that she is present. She is brought from her house to Jana Baha and back again on the streets for no more than a few minutes with few onlookers even aware of what is happening.

2. On Mila Punhi, the beginning full-moon day of Magh (the 15th day of Magh which is also known as Swastani Purnima and usually occurs about mid-January) the god Narayan is carried from his ancient and famous hilltop temple of Changu about two miles north of Bhaktapur to Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu. He is carried about the neck of his bearers in the form of a carved silver water vase, and by the time he reaches Kathmandu at dusk he is followed by a large procession of devotees and preceded by a military contingent of the royal priest of Hanuman Dhoka, waiting to be greeted by Kumari the living Goddess whose house is near by. People press about, fervently whispering, 'Narayan, Narayan, Narayan,' while certain religious ceremonies are conducted in the light of flaming torches. Soon a small band of musicians arrives with Kumari in its midst, carried in the arms of an attendant. He seats her on a low bench near the Narayan image, whence she gazes with round, exotic eyes at the crowd of worshipping onlookers.

Finally, the Taleju temple gate is opened, Narayan is carried quickly inside, guns crack in salute, Kumari is whisked back to her home and the priestly military band marches through the Hanuman Dhoku gate." (Anderson, 229).

3. Ghoda jatra, the festival of horses, is held on Aunsi, the 15th day of the dark lunar fortnight of Chaitra (late March or early April). The festival consists of horse races, bicycle races and such military spectacles as parades and parachute jumping held on the Tundikhel. Huge multi-ethnic crowds attend with the King and foreign dignitaries in the

royal stand at one end of the ground and Kumari at the other end on her own small stand. One informant suggested that the presence of Kumari was a survival from an earlier period, presumably that of the Malla Kings, when the principal feature of Aunsi was a visit to the nearby BhadraKali temple by the Raj Kumari mounted on a horse⁹ and followed by the King and his retainers. Another suggested that Kumari attended the races in her role as Taleju Bhavani. In the popular origin tale of Ghode Jatra the Tundikhel is said to have once been fertile farming land, but people became afraid when farmers began to disappear. The King was disturbed and after appealing to Taleju she came to him in a dream and told him that the field (khel) was the abode of a demon called Tundi and it was he who was killing the farmers. When the demon met his death the people raced over his chest on horseback. The contemporary horse races are run in order to keep Tundi in his place and Kumari as Taleju attends because it was she who advised the King how to get rid of the demon. (See Anderson, 266-7 and Sayami, 1972:39).

4. She again meets Seto Matsyendranath when his chariot (ratha) festival is held from the eighth to the eleventh day of the bright half of Chaitra (April). On the first day she is brought to Jamal or Tindhara near Tri-Chandra College to see the start of the chariot-pulling when the god is brought to Asan tol. The next day Matsyendranath is brought to the Kala Bhairava temple in the palace area, but Kumari remains at home, though possibly viewing some of the proceedings from the window of her house. On the third day the chariot is brought through downtown (kone) Kathmandu to Lagan tol where Kumari is also brought to watch and receive homage from a throne placed beneath a tree. On the fourth and final day Matsyendranath is dragged back to his divine abode at Jana Baha.

5. On the second day of the waxing moon in Gunla (late August) when the Kathmandu bahas and bahis exhibit their sacred images, texts and banners, Kumari is taken on a viewing tour sitting on her decorated platform.

6. On the 12th day of the waxing moon in Bhadra (September), the day of the pole-raising outside Hanuman Dhoka that marks the beginning of Indra jatra, Kumari, accompanied by Ganesa and Bhairava, is taken to Mulchowk to be worshipped by the Acahju priest in charge of Taleju.

7. Two days later, on Ananta Chaturdashi (the 14th day of Bhadra) Kumari jatra begins when thousands gather in the square before her house. Three huge and ancient chariots (plate 8) one for Kumari and the other two for her male attendants Ganesa and Bhairava, wait in the street outside, bands play, masked dancers prance about and the foreign and Nepalese dignitaries line the balcony of the old administration building which faces Kumari che. Shortly after the appearance of the King and Queen on the balcony a male attendant carries Kumari from her house to her chariot amidst tremendous excitement (plate 9). Wearing all her most splendid jewelry and

surrounded by male members of her guthi she sits in a beautifully decorated miniature temple. She is followed by Ganesa (plate 11) and Bhairava - only slightly less lavishly costumed and decorated - who are installed in their own chariots.

After the sacrifice of a goat on the yoke of her chariot (to pacify the dangerous Bhairava plate 10) the procession begins slowly with the firing of guns. As she pauses beneath the dignitaries' balcony the King bows to her while she gazes back solemnly. The procession then moves off through the streets of downtown Kathmandu, where further large crowds wait to greet the three deities. The next day, the day of the full-moon, the procession comes out again to go through the streets of north Kathmandu. In the evening when they are returning to Hanuman Dhoka they pause near the great blue figure of Akash Bhairava and also before the huge mask of Seto Bhairava recessed in the wall of the palace. Beer flows from the mouths of the two masks and after Kumari and her attendants have been offered a glass and a plate of food (same baje), the crowd struggles to get a taste of the holy liquor.

Three days later, the last day of Indra jatra known as nainicha jatra, the chariots are taken around the Kilagar area of Kathmandu. It is popularly believed that this is an extra day added by Jayaprakasa Malla to enable one of his concubines living in this district to see the goddess. When the procession returns to Kumari che the three deities are taken from their chariots and standing just in front of the house they are welcomed back by the Taleju priest with the performance of the laso kaso puja. They are then taken inside to prepare for the coming of the King. Kumari retires to her lion throne in the state reception room where attendants fan her with peacock feather fans. Ganesa and Bhairava are taken to an adjacent room where they sit by the window and are also fanned. When the King arrives a short while later, usually about 7 p.m, he first worships Kumari by touching his forehead to her red-painted toes and by offering her a gold coin. She in return gives him prasad by placing a red tika mark on his forehead and a garland of flowers around his neck. He then worships the two male deities in a similar manner by offering ordinary coins but without bowing. The moment he has left, which is a mere seven or eight minutes after his arrival, a huge crowd rushes to the door of Kumari's house struggling to get inside to make their offerings and to also receive her prasad in the form of a tika. A long queue continues until late at night when the festival finally ends with the lowering of Indra's pole outside the palace.

8. On the fifth day of the waxing moon of Aswin she comes out to meet Pachali Bhairava at the gate of Hanuman Dhoka. Pachali is one of the most powerful and popular of the many Bhairavas and his outdoor temple is near the Bagmati river between Tripureswar and Kalimati, just south of old Kathmandu. On the fourth day of Aswin, which actually occurs during Dasain, a sacred kalasa which represents the god is brought from the home

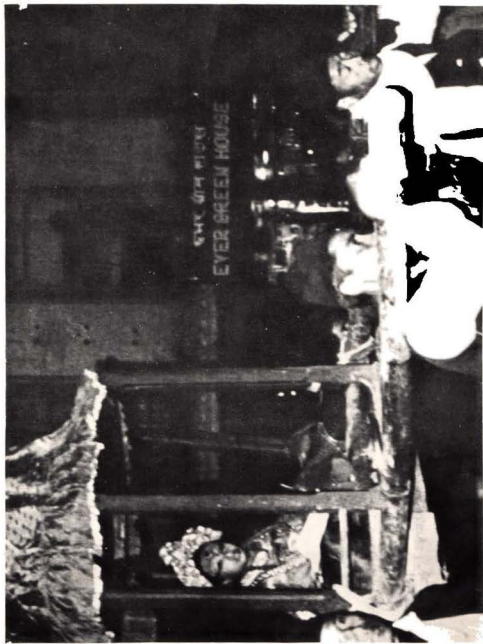


Plate 7. The royal Kumari being carried from Jana Baha to Basantapur after the bathing of Seto Matsyendranath, January, 1974.



Plate 8. The royal Kumari's chariot waiting outside her house during Kumari jatra October, 1974.



Plate 9. The royal Kumari being lifted onto her chariot, October 1974.

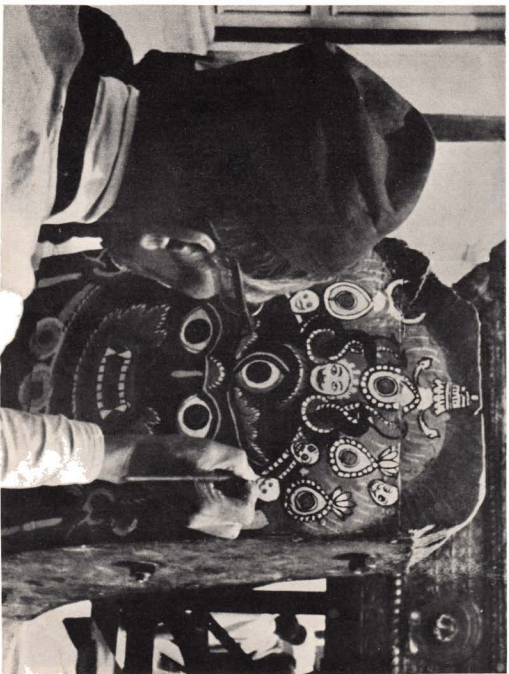


Plate 10. Re-painting Bhairava's face on the prow of the royal Kumari's chariot just prior to her festival, October 1974.



Plate 11. Ganesa, 1970

of the Jyapu peasant caring for him that year to his riverside temple. Until late the following night he remains here to receive the offerings of a constant flow of devotees. They come in musical groups and with gifts of all kinds, including meat, ricebeer and the blood of countless goat and fowl. Then at about midnight a large and excited crowd greets first Ganesa brought as a small image on a Khasai drum and then Ajima as a silver bowl held by a Jyapu. Both the men bearing these sacred representations are themselves believed to be possessed by the spirits of Ganesa and Ajima. The crowd greets Ganesa as the son and Ajima as the wife of Pachali Bhairava, though Ajima is recognised as Ganesa's step-mother, not real mother. After a great deal of wild swaying and shouting the large Pachali Bhairava vessel finally emerges from the temple pit held aloft by some ten reeling men. A procession then forms to take Pachali and Ajima through old Kathmandu to Hanuman Dhoka square in front of the old palace. According to Anderson and indeed confirmed by my informants as the usual procedure, a great puja is then performed in which "several goats and buffaloes are sacrificed and their blood drunk by performers costumed as Bhairava, Kumari and other bloodthirsty deities. The sacrificial animals are furnished by the Government in the name of the King of Nepal, complying with the ancient tradition by which Nepalese Kings themselves formerly attended such ceremonies". (Anderson, 163) When I attended in 1973 events were much simpler with no sacrifices at all; I was told that this was because the state was still in official mourning over Mahendra's death. About five minutes before the procession reached the square at 1.20 a.m. Kumari's young male attendant emerged from her house bearing her on his shoulder and followed by two young girl attendants. He brought her over to the covered terrace just outside the Hanuman Dhoka and placed her on a simple wooden chair. No one witnessed her arrival - indeed the deserted and quiet courtyard gave no indication that an important event was about to take place. Kumari (plate 1) was made up with her usual hair-do and third eye and wore her golden snake necklet and some other ornaments - though far less than on her festival day. The two girls, aged about 13 and 8, stood behind her chair and the young man placed a beautiful silver kalasa and small bowl before her feet. Then over the next five minutes about fifty people assembled near the palace gate to welcome Pachali Bhairava. About half of these, mostly elderly men, paid their respects to Kumari by placing a few coins in her hands and then touching their foreheads to her feet. The youth periodically took the coins from her hands and placed them in the bowl at her feet. Then suddenly in came Ajima and Pachali Bhairava careering wildly across the square and up to the palace doors where they swayed about, circled in, and swayed out again a few times just a few feet below Kumari and without any apparent contact or recognition on either's Part. Just before they moved off again a musket sounded loudly and I noticed the male attendant quickly covered Kumari's ears so that she should not be startled. When Pachali and his retinue had left to return to the Jyapu homes the youth picked Kumari up and carried her back to her house, a mere fifty yards away, followed by the two girl attendants carrying the chair, Kalasa and bowl. Four elderly men followed the little procession playing trumpets.

Informants are far from clear as to why Kumari should be present at this particular ceremony. Some suggested that as the living form of Taleju and hence the confidante of Kings she is required to be present whenever deities are brought to the palace gates - another instance of this being her greeting of Changu Narayan. Another and more specific possibility, however, is that she attends as the daughter of Pachali Bhairava and Taleju Bhavani - a relationship which is dramatized in a Kathmandu dance (Sayami, 14-15). A similar close link between Kumari, Bhairava and Ganesa is also evident in that in the Kumari jatra all three parade together in their chariots. Certainly Pachali is locally represented as the father of Ganesa and in classic Hindu mythology Siva, whose Tantric form is Bhairava, is again Ganesa's father.

9. On kairatri, the 'black night' of the great eighth day (maha astami) of Dasain, 108 buffaloes and 108 goats are slaughtered under state auspices in Mulchowk in the old Hanuman Dhoka palace in central Kathmandu. Mulchowk is immediately adjacent to the Taleju temple, and it is here that the sri yantra mandapa of the goddess is kept for the four important sacrificial days from saptami to dasami. The animals are killed by Kasai, untouchable Newar Buddhists, while tethered to stone pillars placed around the edge of the courtyard. They slit the throat so that the animal dies slowly with prolonged body spasms and a steady small stream of blood from the jugular vein. They then sever the heads and after dragging them around the courtyard take them to the agama on the first floor as offerings to Taleju.

The following evening (navami) nine young Sakya girls and two Sakya boys are prepared at Kumari's house to take the parts of the Gana Kumari and Ganesa and Bhairava. They have a few simple pieces of jewelry and the girls' hair and faces are made-up in the Kumari style. They are brought in a procession across Darbar square to Mulchowk where they are worshipped in an upstairs room by the Acahu priests. They are then taken back to Kumari che and a short while later the royal goddess walks on a cloth to Mulchowk where she is taken to the agama and placed on a seat in the midst of the buffalo heads where she is worshipped by the Acahu priest. I could not, however, obtain any details regarding the rites performed, for the agama is closed to all other than the Taleju priests.

Once again the ambivalent nature of the goddess is made evident. As Kumari the virgin no blood sacrifice should be made to her, a prohibition which applies most especially when she is worshipped as a Buddhist deity. But in her 'inner' role as a living form of the powerful mother-goddess, she can only be satisfied with the warm blood of animals killed in her name. This is equally true whether she is identified with such essentially Hindu deities as Taleju, Durga, Kali, Kaumari or Bala Kumari, or with the Buddhist Vajradevi or Vajrayogini. They are all, in Newar terms, mwahi dya - deities who can only be satisfied with blood (hi) that is alive (mwah). On kairatri night Kumari is brought to the scene of mass sacrifice and is seated in the centre of a ring of gory animal heads

while worshipped by the Acahju-the lower caste priests who often officiate at sacrificial rites. The animals are not, however, directly sacrificed in her name but rather for the enigmatic and formless Taleju; nor is she present during the killing.

On the morning of the following day (navami) a horse, which is said to be Kumari's, is worshipped by a group of women (lakhuni) who live in the palace. Throughout the year the horse is allowed to wander freely in the palace courtyards and it is fed daily from funds supplied by the government guthi office. It is worshipped on navami in conformity with the general practice whereby everyone makes offerings to vehicles, tools, instruments and other practical aids. In a similar manner, offerings are made to Kumari's chariot and portable throne.

None of my informants could provide any explanation as to why Kumari should have a horse. The son of an ex-Raj Cubhaju suggested that it may well pre-date the establishment of a living Kumari and in fact have belonged to Taleju when she was first brought to Nepal. There is only one other occasion when the horse appears in public; when Kumari is taken to the Tundikhel for Ghoda jatra it accompanies her and stands nearby during the races.

The Patan Kumari

This Kumari, who was once the tutelary divinity of the Malla Kings of Patan, is still of considerable importance, especially in her own town. Indeed, if Wright's Vamsavali is correct, she is by far the oldest dating back to the time of Lakshmikamadeva in the 11th century. My informants did not, however, refer to this monarch and instead attributed the origin of her worship to Siddhinarasingh, the 17th century ruler who built the first Taleju temple. The widely-known story recounts how Kumari as Taleju used to come to speak to Siddhinarasingh in his agama in the palace. He ruled the kingdom in accordance with her advice. Then one day when they were playing tripasa his queen saw them through the keyhole. She complained to the King and when the goddess heard this she told him that she could not come any more to a place where she was regarded with suspicion. Siddhinarasingh was worried and asked her if they could not perhaps continue to meet if she took some other form. She told him she would enter into the body of a young girl whose parents were of a degraded and low profession. Siddhinarasingh himself looked for such a family and he selected the Doosah, a section of the Vajracharya caste whose members gather gold-dust from rubbish and melt it down for re-working.

In most of the many versions of this tale as told in the three capital cities the goddess is presented as having chosen the Sakya caste because from the point of view of orthodox Hinduism its members are of

low and degraded status. As melters of gold, symbolically the god Vishnu, they should theoretically be classed amongst the untouchables. Indeed, the work of the Doosah is exceptionally polluting because they disturb the elements by separating gold from copper by using salt and sulphur. The intent of the Taleju Kumari tale would therefore seem to be to represent the King as being penalised for his lust towards the goddess by having to worship her in the form of an untouchable girl. Yet amongst the Newars, the Sakya and Vajracharya are accorded high status as the top-ranking Buddhist castes. The conundrum is resolved by the convenient contradiction in Sakya status - the King meets the goddess' demand but is saved from the pollution risk. Why the goddess should have made such a demand cannot be so easily answered. It may be that the King's dilemma reflects the difficulty experienced by an orthodox Hindu ruler in gaining the allegiance of a predominantly Buddhist population. However, I suspect that the King's difficulty is also, and perhaps more importantly another of the many contradictions inherent in the Kumari cult - the mature and sexually-attractive Taleju who becomes a young virgin, the blood-lusting Durga who as Kumari must never have sacrifices made to her, the young premenstrual girl who has a full set of second teeth and the King who must worship a living goddess of low caste.

The Doosah of Patan are all members of Hawbaha in Gahbaha locality. The baha used to be located in the palace area of Mangal Bazaar, but when Siddhinarasingh wanted the site to extend his palace, he granted the members a new plot of land in Gahbaha. The baha currently has about 170 initiated male members, and with the exception of a single Sakya family resident in Dharan in the east terai, all are Vajracharya. 'Doosah' is the hereditary occupation of the Vajracharya, and even today more men follow this profession than any other.

The Patan Kumari is chosen from the daughters of the Hawbaha men. I was given the following description of the selection procedure by the father of the girl who was in office from 1946 to 1951. When the previous incumbent, who was then about 12, was seen to be no longer fit because of some strange signs of ugliness on her face, a report was sent to the Hakim of the Chebhadel section of the Patan administrative system. The Hakim was one of the surviving officers of the old Malla regime and until the position was abolished in recent years, the hereditary incumbent carried out a number of ceremonial tasks. In Malla times he would have been one of the most powerful men in the Kingdom. He came to Hawbaha and after looking at the girl declared her unfit, whereupon a man immediately went around the locality announcing that all eligible girls should be brought to the baha. Twenty girls came and sat on the raised platform (phalcha) just to the right of the entrance where the Mulpujari ('Chief priest') of Taleju, a Deo Brahman by caste, examined them with the Hakim acting as witness. Partly by interrogation of the girls' mothers and partly by physical examination he reduced the field to just

four. The criteria of selection, both in theory and in practice, are the same as for the Kathmandu Kumari. The Mulpujari then took them to the Bada Guraju (Royal Priest) in Kathmandu for final selection. The wife of the Bada Guraju first examined them physically and as a result two more were disqualified. Now the Bada Guraju asked two male assistants what they thought and after some consultation, they recommended my informant's daughter. The Bada Guraju, after a brief examination, declared her to be the next Kumari.

Though maha astami of Dasain is regarded as the ideal occasion for the installation of a new Patan Kumari, some other auspicious day may be named by the royal astrologer if this should prove necessary in order to avoid the disaster of no Kumari to attend the Matsyendranath festival in April or May. After selection by the Bada Guraju she is brought to the King who pays brief homage, and then returns to Patan in a procession. A short while later, when the auspicious day arrives, she is brought to the home of the Mulpujari¹⁰ in Mangal Bazaar who performs the long and complicated rituals in which she literally becomes the goddess. The only people who attend are the Mulpujari and those members of his family who wish to, the Jyoshi Jyoti (Newar astrologer) and the girl herself. The whole ceremony is called Kumari sthapana puja ('Kumari foundation worship') The girl sits naked in front of the priest and his assistant for the introductory purification ceremony (sachaielasnan puja) in which her body is sprinkled with water from a holy vessel (kalasa). Then follows the main puja in which her body is cleansed of all previous life experience so that the spirit of the goddess may enter a perfectly pure being. It is called angasodhana puja (anga means 'parts of body' and sodhana is a form of purification) or sat chakra sodhana puja. The girl continues to sit naked while the priest purifies each of the six sensitive parts of her body by reciting a mantra and by touching each with a bundle of sanctified items such as long grass (kus), a dry twig (sitho), tree bark and various leaves. The six sensitive parts (chakra or kamal) together with the number of sanctified items for each are as follows:

1. agya: eyes - two
2. adhar: vulva - four
3. swadisthan: vagina - six
4. manipuraka: navel - ten
5. anahata: breasts - twelve
6. bisuddhi: throat - sixteen.

As the priest removes from the girl's spiritual body all her past experience of the world, she gradually begins to get redder and redder as the spirit of Kumari enters into her. My informant, a Deo-Brahman who had attended the rite as an assistant, assured me that he saw this colour transformation.

When the rite is finished the Mulpujari gives the girl sagan (ritual food consisting of boiled egg, flattened rice, curd, dried fish, boiled meat and rice wine) a betel nut and a new set of Kumari clothes. He then sends word to her family asking them to send someone, usually the girl's mother, to dress her, do her hair and facial make-up in the Kumari manner, and to decorate her with jewelry. Meanwhile, he himself prepares her throne, which is a simple low stool, by drawing the Sri Yantra mandapa on it with lime powder. This triangle-based mandapa has for long been regarded as the powerful emblem of the Sakti or Devi of Tantricism. As he chants the appropriate mantra he covers the stool with a clean cloth and white cushion. The girl sits on her throne and it is at this moment that she is said to have become Kumari - the combined power of the mandapa and the mantra effect the final and complete transformation.

The Mulpujari worships her for the first time with a full-scale Kumari puja - a complex of ritual actions that lasts about three hours. She is then brought from the puja room to a larger chamber where she is feasted in company with the rest of the Mulpujari's agnatic kin plus spouses. A procession is then formed in which she is carried from Mangal Bazaar to her parents' home. She sits here in a reception room for many hours while members of the public come to worship her and to receive her tika.

The Kumari che, which is very small and without any decorative wood-carvings, is part of the corporate property of Hawbaha. It contains little other than a throne for the goddess and the building is rarely used other than during Dasain. When seen from the courtyard there is only one indication that the building is anything other than an ordinary simple dwelling - a small carved stone insert on the wall which contains three emblems which can be collectively worshipped as Kuamri when she is not physically present. They are from left to right a karti patra, dhalbar and karuna. The first consists of a karti on top and patra below; a karti in turn consists of a shristi and a samhar, symbols of creation and destruction, and the patra is a footprint. The whole thing is a symbol of the basic philosophical notion of an endless cycle of creation and destruction. The dhalbar stands for wisdom and the karuna, which one informant described as being in the form of a feather from a peacock (the mount of Kumari) signifies compassion.

The Patan Kumari, unlike her royal counterpart in Kathmandu, lives at home with her family. However, unlike most of the lesser Kumaris described below, she is constantly treated as a goddess and hence lives a most unusual life of restriction and veneration. Her family must set aside three rooms - a small private one in which she sleeps and eats, another small one which contains her throne and is used for daily and other small-scale pujas, and a larger one which is used for post-worship feasts, large-scale pujas and formal receptions. A member of her family, most commonly her father, acts as pujari and he must perform nitya puja



Plate 12. The Patan Kumari, October, 1974



Plate 13. Kumari standing on her peacock mount on the wooden torana over the door in Mawhaha that leads to her house.

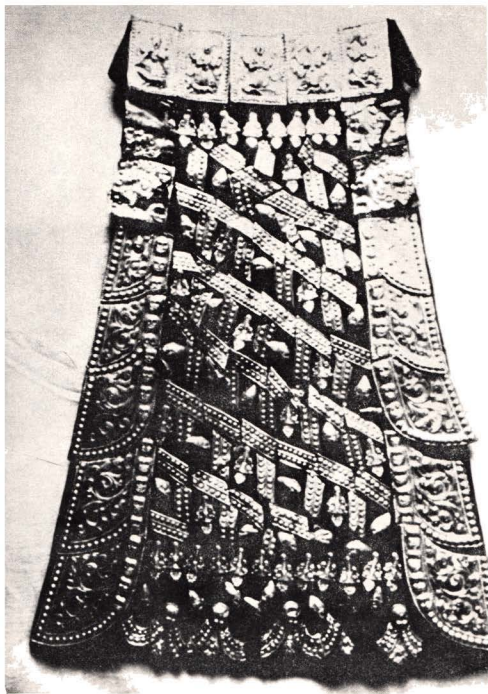


Plate 14. The Patan Kumari's apron(jabhi)



Plate 15. One of the Patan Kumari's necklaces(narasilamala)

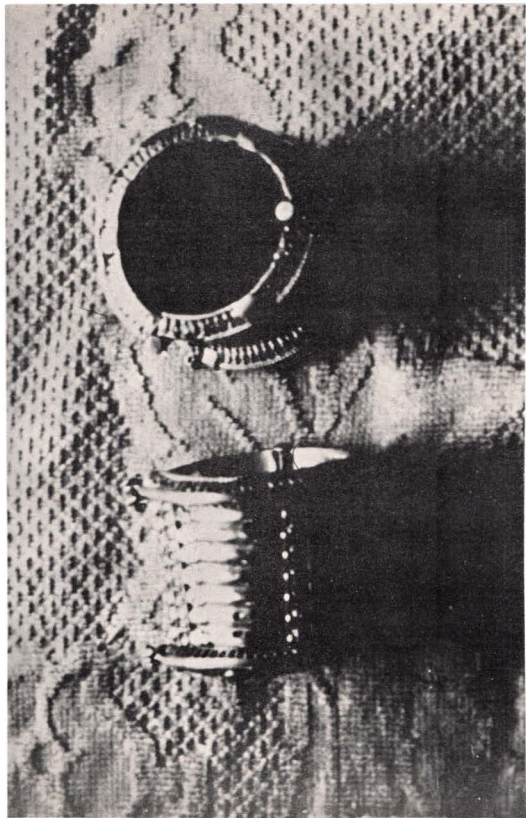


Plate 16. The Patan Kumari's bangles(no)

each morning. About 8 a.m. she enters the puja room and sits on her throne while her pujari worships her for about half an hour with incense, burning lights, flowers, grain, cooked eggs, meat and rice wine. She should as a minimum requirement wear red clothes, have on her forehead the third eye and her hair done up in the Kumari style. Members of the public may come to worship her also at nitya puja: some just have offerings, others may wish to bow to her feet, recite mantras etc. They wait outside the open room until the pujari has finished his devotions and then make their own offerings. Those who wish to perform a full Kumari puja, of which there are a number of different kinds, must first seek audience with the goddess and ask her permission. If she gives her assent a suitable day will be selected after consultation with the family astrologer. On such occasions it is usual for the client to bring his own priest to perform the puja. I was informed that other than during Dasain, when perhaps 300-400 people come to worship her, only about five or six a week make offerings. They include the following categories:

1. Those who have been placed under food or other restrictions through participation in one of the samskaras (life-cycle rituals) commonly perform Kumari puja as a means of release from the taboo.
2. Individuals who have bleeding problems - especially women with menstrual difficulties, but including cases of haemorrhage and chronic vomiting.
3. Government officials fearing demotion.
4. She is also credited with the power of foreseeing future events, so those with ambitious plans, such as the opening of a new shop, may seek advice.

Though the father or some other male member of the family looks after the girl's ritual requirements, it is the mother who cares for her daily needs, looks after her clothes and jewelry, arranges special pujas or interviews and in general exercises a great influence in her life. Providing the girl conforms in such matters as puja attendance, dress, daily purification, food taboos, sleeping arrangements, and a prohibition against going outside the house other than on fixed special occasions, she may do whatever she wishes. If she so desires she may take part in ordinary domestic tasks, but she must never be asked to do so. Indeed, even pujas may only be performed providing she assents, and if she objects to certain kinds of rituals, such as long ones, they must be avoided. As a goddess she should not need any formal education and certainly she does not attend school. However, the present Incumbent, who has been in office for some 17 years and is now over 19 years old, has received private tuition from her mother and other family members.

The age of the present Kumari (plate 12) is most unusual and is the cause of considerable comment and unease amongst Patan residents. The formal signs of disqualification are the same as for the Kathmandu Kumari--bleeding, especially first menstruation, loss of tooth, bad illness and any kind of skin disfigurement, especially smallpox. The task of reporting the presence of any disqualifying sign is in the hands of those who look after her, above all her mother, and until such a report is made no formal action can be taken. Though it is theoretically possible that the girl may not have experienced menstrual bleeding and may have lost her first teeth without noticeable loss of blood, most of my informants were inclined to be sceptical. They assumed that some signs must have appeared but they have been either ignored or overlooked for various reasons. Though a few might suspect the girl's mother of wishing to prolong the family's social prominence and perhaps even the small financial reward of having a Kumari in the family, most are of the opinion that the situation is the result of difficulty in finding a girl whose parents would agree to her becoming Kumari. Despite the modest wealth that goes to the girl's family from offerings and from the Kumari guthi, few wish to see their daughter miss school-going years. Meanwhile, the size of the present incumbent creates a few embarrassments and difficulties. When she goes out of the house to attend a special function she must be carried, and because she is now so heavy she needs two men to bear her on a palanquin or four on a throne. Small Kumaris can be carried in the arms of their fathers or other male relatives.

Her jewelry, though less valuable than that of her Kathmandu counterpart, nevertheless constitutes an impressive collection. I was shown the following:

1. motu (or cakri): a silver headdress with 13 petals (kinkimba).
2. jabhi: a red cloth-apron decorated with carved silver-plated metal strips. (plate 14).
3. basukinagmala: a silver-plated necklace named after the king of the water serpents and supposedly the oldest piece of jewelry in her collection. It was sent from Guyheswori to protect her.
4. bijbanta taya: a gold-plated necklace always worn by brides at the marriage ceremony.
5. taya: a simpler gold-plated necklace with plated red threads for the band part and said to represent seven nagas or serpents.
6. narasilamala: a necklace with 24 silver-plated heads. (plate 15).
7. sikrimala: a necklace made of silver-plated chain links.
8. banmala: a necklace with 20 silver-plated six-petalled flowers.
9. suchephu: cloth armbands with silver-plated decorations.

10. mo: silver-plated bracelets. (plate 16).
11. pyeka angu: four plain silver rings worn on the third and first fingers of each hand.
12. bhanju: silver-plated anklets of linked squares.
13. tutibage: silver-plated anklets with bells.

Members of Hawbaha who wish to perform either one of the more complex Kumari pujas or some other puja in which the presence of the goddess is desirable, may, providing she gives her assent, do so in their own homes. Such privately-arranged engagements are, however, rare events, and her contact with the outside world is mostly restricted to those few annual events at which her presence is mandatory. They are as follows:

1. The festival of Red Matsyendranath

There are five separate occasions when she is brought out to sit on her throne (kha) to view the passing procession and to accept the offerings of devotees. The first occurs on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Baisakh when the two chariots of Minnath and Matsyendranath begin their long journey through Patan to Lagankhel. The second occurs a day or two later at Gahbaha close to her own Hawbaha, and the third near Thatibaha on the edge of Lagankhel where a huge crowd gathers to witness the dropping of a coconut and seven other auspicious objects from the top of Matsyendranath's spire. The two chariots remain for some time at Lagankhel waiting for the auspicious day for the final stage of the journey to Jawalakhel. On that day Matsyendranath stops briefly in front of a resthouse about half way to Jawalakhel where Kumari sits enthroned. Finally, she is brought out to attend the dramatic concluding ceremony at Jawalakhel when the ancient sacred waist-coat (bhoto), is displayed to an enormous crowd which includes the royal family, government officials and military officers. For this occasion she is enthroned in a dharماسala in front of the chariot and beside the royal stand. On each of these outings she is, if small enough, carried by her father or brother, or if too big then a number of Jyapus carry her in a palanquin. Though the formal aim is to enable her to witness events, an additional motive is to provide an opportunity for large numbers of persons to make offerings to Kumari herself. The only reason my informants could give for her special interest in Matsyendranath is that his is by far the biggest and most important festival of Patan. It may well be that she also attends because her own patron, the King, is present. In the days of the Mallas, the King of Patan, often accompanied by the Kings of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, joined the procession on foot for the last stage from Chukabaha to Lagankhel. (Locke, 1973:29).

2. Dasain

On navami the ninth night of Dasain, 11 children of Hawbaha, nine of them girls and two boys, are prepared to take the parts of the Gana ('group') Kumari, together with Ganesa and Bhairava. Preparation is fairly simple consisting of face make-up with third-eye, hair preparation in usual Kumari style with some simple head ornaments and a shawl. The sama (make-up box of powders for tika mark etc.) and the sambahr (cosmetics) are supplied by the government. The names of the Gana Kumari are those of the Asta Matrika plus Ugrachandi; in effect, the Nava Durga who are individually worshipped on the first nine days of Dasain at their respective pitha. The criteria of selection for the girls are technically the same as for the chief Kumari with emphasis placed on no loss of teeth and no smallpox scars. It is also regarded as desirable that all of the baha girls who conform to these criteria should be selected at least once, so first choice is given to those who have not yet had a turn. The Ganesa and Bhairava boys should be beautiful and without any kind of physical imperfection. Meanwhile, the Mulpujari and his assistants perform sodhana puja at Taleju temple for the Gana Kumari. When finished he walks to Hawbaha carrying a tray of blessings (prasad) for the Kumari party. In order to ensure that no one touches him, two Mahans, one in front and the other behind, accompany him. (There are altogether five Mahan who are maintained by the government as caretakers at Mangal Bazaar) On arrival he touches each of the girls and boys on the forehead and gives them the prasad of Taleju. A procession is then formed to bring the party back again to Mulchowk in Mangal Bazaar. The Mahan womenfolk, who normally live in the palace and do such work as cleaning its many shrines and bringing water and daily offerings to its resident deities, carry the nine young Kumaris to Mulchowk. The procession also includes a small musical group sent by the government. On arrival at Mulchowk the Mulpujari and his assistants take the girls to a first floor room where he worships them in a brief ceremony that focusses on the presentation of rice, fruit and boiled eggs. When the girls leave the room by its western door they are each presented with a clay stove, 2 pots (one for rice and the other for pulses), a clay lid (kapan) for a bread pan, a steaming pot (potasi) with holes in the bottom and some fruit. The pots, which are presented by the government, are all of toy size and intended to be used as such by the girls. Finally, they are carried back in procession to Hawbaha.

Some time later in the same evening, a sword, token of Malla royalty, is sent from the palace to Kumari che to summon her to Taleju temple. Carried on a palanquin by Jyapu attendants she is brought in a formal procession with accompanying bands, including one sent by the government. She is placed in the shrine on the west side of Mulchowk where the Deo-Brahmins perform long and complex pujas in her honour. These should take from five to six hours, but because the present Kumari dislikes

such long sessions all but the most important are performed prior to her arrival. The shrine in which these rites are performed is without an image other than during the main four days of Dasain when it contains the sri yantra mandapa of Taleju. The simultaneous presence of the two deities in the one shrine once again indicates their common identity.

Some hours later, when it is past midnight and hence already viñaya dasami, Kumari is carried back to her parents' home where she begins the day's rejoicings by giving her own Dasain tika: first to her pujari, (at present her elder brother), then to the Taleju Deo-Brahmans, the various hereditary functionaries still maintained in the old Malla palace, and finally to members of the general public.

Two days later on the twelfth day of Dasain she is taken out again on her portable throne to be worshipped by the members of two private endowments (guthi) and to give prasad to the pole on which Narendra Malla (King of Patan from 1684 to 1705) stands outside his palace. She first goes to Dhaubaha where just one family remains in a guthi which was established to worship her in the time of Siddhinarasingh (early seventeenth century). The guthi supplies all the puja items, but the ritual is performed by her own pujari. She is then taken to the home of two Shrestha families in Sota locality just north of the palace. Here the Shresthas themselves perform a brief and simple puja in which they offer Kumari sweets, fruit and flowers. Finally she is carried on her throne to the base of Narendra's pole where she places a betel nut and a coin. By so doing she is giving notification that in two days time she will come to be worshipped - just as she once did long ago when Narendra himself worshipped her in the palace. Hence on the fourteenth day she is again carried to Mulchowk courtyard where the Taleju Deo-Brahman offers her betel, rice, butter and sugar.

3. During the month of Gunla when bahas and bahis exhibit some of their oldest and most precious images, manuscripts and paintings, Kumari sits in Hawbaha courtyard on three separate occasions - on Panchadan (eight-day of bright lunar fortnight) Dhanjaliya (the day after the full moon) and on Mataya. On each occasion she sits for about two hours on her decorated throne (singhasana - 'lion's seat') just to the right of the main Sakyamuni Buddha shrine in the open courtyard. On the first two occasions, as the visitors pour in to make offerings to the baha gods and sacra, they do likewise to the seated Kumari. However, on Mata-Ya no offerings are made to Kumari for this day is devoted to the worship of chaityas; she simply sits on her throne to witness proceedings.

4. In the month of Bhadra on Gatila fasting day a puja is performed in each locality to three famous goddesses, Basundhara Kumari and Maha lakshmi, in order to ensure a good harvest. In Gahbaha, flanked by painting of Vasundhara and Mahalakshmi, the living Kumari is worshipped in her agama in her official residence by the Thapaju and Petaju of Hawbaha.

Vasundhara is the Mahayana Buddhist equivalent of Mahalakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and good fortune. She is represented as the beautiful 16 year old consort of Jambhala, the Buddhist god of wealth, and her chief symbol is an ear of corn. A learned Vajracharya Pandit of Patan informed me that these three deities, together with Vajra yogini, are all forms of a single goddess but each is associated with a particular yuga or 'age'. In Krita or Satyayuga the goddess was Vajra yogini and of fiery colour, in Tretayuga she was Vasundhara and yellow, in Dwaparayuga she was Mahalakshmi and orange, and in the present Kaliyuga she is Kumari and red.

When a Kumari falls ill a doctor can only be summoned if the illness is so serious that she is first declared to be unfit and therefore no longer Kumari. In the time of Chandra Shamshere (Prime Minister 1901-29) a Kumari died while in office. The government arranged and paid for her funeral which was carried out with considerable pomp and splendour. She was taken to Bagmati Ghat in a big procession with many bands. Should a member of Kumari's family die whilst resident in the same building she must immediately leave and stay with some other relative - preferably her maternal uncle (paju). Because her own pujari, usually her father or brother, is in mourning and hence cannot worship her the family priest takes over daily worship. She herself does not enter mourning and after seven days she returns to her father's home.

When the girl is declared unfit for office she immediately ceases to be regarded as a goddess, and unlike her Kathmandu counterpart, is not required for any final de-fusing or transfer ceremony. She resumes the normal life of a girl of her age and it seems that her parents do not experience any difficulty in finding a suitable husband of Sakya or Vajracharya caste. My informants were of the opinion that though there is always an element of risk in marrying a girl who was once a goddess, there is also added prestige. The risk is that if some of the rules and regulations concerning Kumari, especially as regards her daily worship, were not properly observed, then she and her husband may well experience some kind of trouble, especially financial.

The fathers of two previous Patan Kumaris both told me of unusual events which they regarded as clear evidence of the presence of divinity in their families. The first, whose daughter held office from 1951 to 1956 when aged two to seven, saw a pile of charcoal in his house burst spontaneously into flames the day prior to the disqualification of the previous Kumari. After his initial surprise he managed to put it out with water, but only with some difficulty. He and his wife then went upstairs where they saw a red snake on the steps - a sure sign that some god or goddess had come to the house. Late that evening they found yet another snake in the family prayer room (agama) and then the following day the Bada Guraju selected his daughter to be the next Kumari. Nothing unusual occurred during her tenure of office, though the father suspects that some financial trouble he has since experienced may be due to



Plate 17. The Ekanta Kumari, Bhadgaon during Dasain, October, 1974



Plate 18. The Ekanta Kumari, Bhadgaon on her throne for worship by an Acahju priest during Dasain, October, 1974

mistakes or omissions on his part in his role as pujari. He first suspected her approaching unfitness when she developed some facial pimples, and observing the rule of good skin he immediately reported the matter to the Chebbadel office in Mangal Bazaar. However, after examination the officer declared her to be still Kumari. About three weeks later she lost her first tooth by spitting it onto her hand and this immediately led to her disqualification. She is now a young woman of 26 and apparently happily married to a man of Vajracharya caste employed in government service. They have three small children.

The father of the Kumari who held office from 1946-51 when aged five to ten is a much-respected and prosperous owner of a shop which both makes and sells gold jewelry. He is a man of about 55 and he takes a prominent part in community and baha affairs. I have already provided his description of how his daughter was selected. He also told me that he had premonition of the impending event. One night some weeks prior to selection she cried out in her sleep saying that a fox had come. Then the next morning he saw a large snake coiled up on the ledge of her window. He was very worried by these events, but those who understand such matters told him not to worry for they certainly indicated some good news. Two minor events of some note occurred during her period as Kumari. He himself usually did daily puja to her in the morning and on one occasion he became senseless while sitting in front of her. He thinks that he sat for about half an hour in some kind of trance and when he recovered he felt most alarmed. He assumed that it must have been the result of some error he had made in the performance of the ritual. The girl's mother did the brief evening puja in which light offerings are made, and she too once fainted after the performance. The girl is now a pretty and contented-looking mother of six daughters. Her husband is a Sakya and he owns a shop near the old Newar palace. According to the father they are happily married. She never speaks to anyone of her period as Kumari.

Bhadgaon Kumaris

Bhadgaon, formerly Bhaktapur, is a Newar city of about 40,112 persons located nine miles east of Kathmandu. It was reputedly founded by King Ananda Deva in 899 AD and for much of the period up to the Gorkha conquest some 850 years later the reigning King either ruled the valley alone or maintained a clear ascendancy over the two principalities of Patan and Kathmandu. Predictably, the Kumari cult was of great importance and closely linked with the royal worship of Taleju. Even today, though the cult has suffered through lack of royal patronage for over 200 years, it is still a prominent and integral part of the worship of Taleju and the Nava Durga during Dasain.

There are three individual living Kumaris as well as a Gana (group) Kumari recognised today in Bhadgaon. The Gana Kumari is made up of eight young girls who take the parts of the Asta Matrika plus three boys as

Ganesa, Bhairava and Mahadeva. All of these girls are selected from the Vajracharya/Sakya community in Bhadgaon. There are altogether about 500 Vajracharya and 700 Sakya divided amongst five bahas.

The three living Kumaris are known as Ekanta (plates 17 and 18), Wala Lakhu, and Tebuk. The Ekanta ('alone' or 'isolated') is by far the most important and is Bhadgaon's equivalent to the Royal Kumaris of Kathmandu and Patan. Though she lives at home with her parents she has an official residence (Kumari che), a large but simple and undecorated building in the courtyard of Dipankara Baha (Adibuddhavihara or Deonani) in north-east Bhadgaon. The building is permanently occupied by a family that has for some generations held an hereditary right to act as dyapala to all of Bhadgaon's Kumaris and as caretaker of Kumari che and its contents. The family at present consists of two men aged about 50 and 35 who are related as uncle and nephew and who share the work together with their wives and children. In addition to the living quarters of this family the building contains two rooms used as the agamas of the Ekanta and Wala Lakhu Kumaris. It also contains two thrones for the Ekanta Kumari - one kept downstairs, the other outside her agama on the first floor - and a storeroom for her clothes and jewelry.

All three Kumaris are closely linked on a number of grounds: they are selected by a single committee using identical criteria from a common pool of candidates, they are all recognised as forms of Taleju, they have the same dyapala, and they come together during Dasain. One informant explained the connection between the three by observing that when Taleju first came to Bhadgaon she emerged from a hole in a tree and then sat down at the three localities of Wala Lakhu, Tebuk and Bache. This is why she wanted to take the form of a Sakya Vajracharya girl in each of these localities.

The Ekanta Kumari is selected initially by the dyapala on the basis of the usual criteria. He then summons the three seniormost men (thakali) of the Joshi, Achaju and Deo-Brahman who have hereditary ritual duties at the Taleju temple in the old Malla palace. These three men, together with the Sakya dyapala, must be present at all important Kumari pujas, and together they constitute the formal selection committee. She must undergo a number of tests to ensure that she has a steady nerve and so is suitable as a vehicle for the blood-lusting Taleju. The Deo-Brahman is made up in a frightening manner and the girl is required to sit on his knee without showing alarm. She must then sit on the Kumari throne with its canopy of nine serpents carved in wood and again she must remain calm. These tests, which I understand are carried out in a perfunctory manner, are conducted in Kumari che and it is here also that the installation rites are performed by the three palace functionaries. Unlike Kathmandu, where these rites should occur on maha astami, and also unlike Patan where any auspicious day is suitable, in Bhadgaon they must be performed

a few days prior to ghatasthapana, the first day of Dasain, and preferably on either a Thursday or Sunday. The aim of this arrangement is to ensure that they have a Kumari for Dasain.

A Vajracharya informant told me that once during the time of the Mallas the orthodox Hindu King took such exception to bowing down to a Sakya Kumari that a girl was chosen from the Deo-Brahman community to take her place. However, when she was brought to Taleju at Dasain for the buffalo sacrifice she became afraid and cried. A report of this was sent to the King who immediately re-established the tradition of selecting the goddess from the Sakya community. The chief signs of disqualification are smallpox, loss of teeth and menses, but whereas in Patan and Kathmandu the emphasis is on menses, in Bhadgaon the tooth criterion is the most important. Because of this the girls seldom remain in office beyond about 7 or 8 years of age. The present incumbent was installed in 1974 when aged about 5.

The girl lives at home with her family, and other than during Dasain or when required for some individual puja she lives a life that differs little from that of other children. She must avoid death-pollution (jutho), and must always wear her third eye. The Kumari hair-do and red clothes are regarded as desirable, but no one minds too much if they are ignored. She may play in the neighbourhood just like other children and may also attend school if old enough. Her family need not perform daily puja because the dyapala does it in her name at her official residence. She has some silver jewelry which is kept in Mulchowk in the palace compound and wears it only at Dasain and for especially grand individual pujas. The Gana Kumari also have a certain amount of jewelry, but the two lesser goddesses possess only simple red clothes.

When a client wishes to do Kumari puja he first approaches the dyapala who then goes to her family home and arranges for her to come to her official residence on a suitable and auspicious occasion. Her mother fixes her hair do and third eye and dresses her in red clothes and she then either walks or if too small is carried by some member of her family. If the occasion is sufficiently important the dyapala will add some or all of her formal jewelry. She may only get a few such requests for individual puja each year and most come from Kathmandu government officials anxious about the security of their positions.

The big occasion for Ekanta, indeed for all the Bhadgaon Kumaris, is during Dasain. The first important event occurs on the full-moon day 15 days prior to the beginning of Dasain. The Sakya dyapala selects a suitable baby to be the new Tebuk Kumari, and also examines both the Wala Lakhu and Ekanta girls for any signs of disqualification. The Tebuk Kumari is a small baby still suckling at its mother's breast and a new infant must be found each year. Though the baby must be chosen

from the Sakya/Vajracharya community it is chiefly worshipped by the many Jyapus who live in the vicinity of Tebuk che. On navami, the principal day for blood sacrifices to Durga and Taleju, Tebuk Kumari is brought to her Jyapu home to be worshipped by the people of that locality in company with the Ekanta and Gana Kumari. The Gana Kumari are given seats in a small downstairs room which when I saw it was being used as a straw storehouse by the farmer residents of the courtyard. The Ekanta Kumari sits alone on a balcony in an even smaller neighbouring courtyard, and for some hours local Jyapu residents come to make offerings. The tiny Tebuk Kumari is worshipped inside the building in her agama by members of her guthi who are mostly senior Jyapu residents of the locality, but include also the girl's Sakya parents and an Acahju (Karmacharya) priest. Puja can be performed by either the Acahju or the Jyapu thakali (lineage elder), and I was told that if anyone other than the members of her guthi should see this Kumari then some kind of misfortune would befall the locality.

The Wala Lakhu is regarded as the next most important after the Ekanta. These two have their agamas in the official Kumari che, and both stay there for 11 days at Dasain. Wala Lakhu, however, also has an agama in a courtyard in the big square that contains the famous Dattatreya temple. The courtyard is similar to those found in bahas and on the ground floor opposite the entrance there is a shrine containing a female deity called Devi. The surrounding building is called Wala Lakhu (lakhu means 'palace') and informants were of the opinion that it was once owned by the Malla kings. The importance of the building is evident in that Bhadgaon's most famous deities, the Nava Durga, also have their agama here. The Wala Lakhu Kumari is said to have been established when the concubine of a Malla King who lived in Wala wanted to worship and see Kumari during Dasain. The Ekanta Kumari is so sacred that only those without pollution can worship her - certainly a concubine would be quite out of order. So the King began this Wala Lakhu Kumari especially for his concubine.

Each morning during the main period of Dasain (from the morning after ghatasthapana to dasami) two Acahju priests come from Taleju to Kumari che where they worship the Ekanta Kumari in her agama. A little later she is taken in a formal procession, preceded by two men holding her silver staffs and followed by another carrying her big ceremonial umbrella over her head, to Catuvarnamahavihara (Sankhota Baha) - a beautiful baha located close to the palace and which still has a substantial membership. If big enough the girl will walk all the way with her bare feet directly touching the ground, but if very small then she will be carried some or all of the way by her dyapala. All along the route passers-by stop and briefly worship her by offering a coin and by touching their foreheads to her red-painted toes. At Sankhota she is taken upstairs to the agama where she is first worshipped by the seniormost female palace attendant, who also brings her the prasad of Taleju, and

then by anyone else of the baha or locality who wishes to do so. On her return to Kumari che she is again worshipped by many of those who pass her along the road. On her return she first sits on her impressive downstairs throne where she is briefly worshipped by a local Acahju priest (plate 18) and then goes upstairs to her agama where she is worshipped by her dyapala.

On navami the people of Wala Lakhu come and take their Kumari to her local agama where she remains for some hours to receive homage - I was told that originally she went there to be seen and worshipped by the King's concubine. Also on navami, usually late afternoon or early evening, the Gana Kumari and the Ekanta Kumari are taken from Kumari che to Tebuk che. When the locals have finished their offerings a group of palace officials, accompanied by a band, arrive to take the Gana Kumari to Mulchowk. They are brought to an upstairs room where they are worshipped by the current dyapalas of the Acahju, Joshi and Deo-Brahman families who still share important hereditary duties connected with the worship of Taleju and other palace deities. A few hours later the officials and band return to Tebuk che where they collect the Ekanta Kumari and bring her through Mulchowk to the inner Kumari chowk. She is seated on a large throne placed in the centre of the courtyard, and as in Kathmandu she is surrounded with the heads of many of the animals that had been killed in Mulchowk earlier the same day. She is here worshipped in a secret and lengthy manner by the three Taleju dyapalas. Taleju herself, possibly in the form of a metal sri yantra, is brought down to Mulchowk on the two previous days (saptami and astami) - she does not appear during the visits of Ekanta and Gana Kumaris on navami.

There is an interesting connection between the Gana Kumari and the more famous Nava Durga of Bhadgaon. The eight female members of the Gana Kumari are the same Asta Matrika who appear together with Ugrachandi, in the Nava Durga. However, whereas the Gana Kumari take the form of young girls, the Nava Durga are represented by mature males temporarily possessed by the spirits of the mother goddesses. The nine days of Dasain culminating in navami are devoted to the separate worship of each of these goddesses, with devotees visiting their nine shrines (pithas) located around Bhadgaon on each day in turn. Then on dasami, the concluding tenth day of rejoicing, the Nava Durga dancers go to Taleju temple at midnight. After the puja the dancers set out on a long route through much of Bhadgaon and out to the surrounding small towns of Banepa, Thimi and Nala. They do not at any stage meet their Kumari counterparts, though a further connection holds between the two groups in that the Nava Durga and the Wala Lakhu Kumari share the same agama in Wala Lakhu.

3. The Kathmandu Vajracharya Kumaris

The Royal Kumaris, though selected from the Newar Buddhist community are closely identified with the worship of such Hindu deities as Taleju, Durga and the Asta Matrika. In each instance their priests are Hindus, either Deo-Brahman or the Karmacharya section of the Acahju. In Kathmandu, however, the Vajracharya community has its own Kumaris who are worshipped by priests using Buddhist texts, and are commonly identified with such Buddhist deities as Tara, Vajradevi or Vajravarahi. The 18 main bahas of Kathmandu have for long been divided into three sections (phui) based on locality: the north (Tham or Thane), central (Datutheva - from Asan to Maru tol) and southern (Yan or Kone). Each section maintains its own separate membership and organisation as well as combining into a single inclusive acharya Guthi that meets annually at Swayambhu. Though today there is only one Vajracharya Kumari left in the city, she is specifically associated with the north (Thane), and only a few years ago another was resident at Mubaha in the central zone. Vajracharyas of downtown or south Kathmandu did not know of any similar exclusive Kumari for their area, though some pointed out that the royal Sakya Kumari has a particularly close connection with their area of Kathmandu.

Mubaha

The Mubaha Kumari is of special interest because for Vairayana Buddhists she is by far the most important. By this I mean that for any individual or group that wishes to perform a specifically Vairayana ceremony that includes the worship of a living Kumari the first choice would be the Mubaha girl. It is she who provides the most perfect representation of such female Tantric divinities as Vajradevi, Vajravarahi, or Trailokyadevi. Furthermore, she may even be regarded as superior to the royal Kumari in that if the latter should become ill her attendants are required to send offerings to her Mubaha counterpart.

The fame and prestige of this Kumari is, however, largely confined to the small world of Kathmandu Newar Buddhists. When the last incumbent finally gave up office in 1972 it was only after a considerable period had elapsed since the loss of her first tooth. This delay was caused by the lack of any willing successor. Over a year later the position was still vacant and looked as though it would remain so.

A member of Mubaha (Malasrimahavihara) told me that the first Vajracharya settlement in the valley had been in a town called Batisputali near Pashupatinath where they all stayed in a monastery called Pimbaha. At this time the dyapala at Pashupatinath was a Vajracharya who led the community in the performance of powerful Tantric nijas. One day the secret goddess Guhyeswori told them to found a new baha. They made one out of the wood of a single tree and as the first to be built in Kat'mandu

it was known as Mu (chief) baha. Guhyeswori also told them to introduce the tantric form of puja with the Sakti or Devi represented by a living Kumari.

Mubaha is closely linked with another of the central Kathmandu bahas called Tahsibaha (Suratsrimahavihara). Both have Guhyeswori as their ancestral deity (digo dyo), a circumstance which is attributed to a common origin from the Guhyeswori area, and together they are unique amongst Kathmandu bahas in performing piya or khadga (sword) jatra on the eleventh rather than the tenth day of Dasain. Though the living Kumari resides at Mubaha and is often selected from its membership, the chakreswor (seniormost Vajracharya responsible for important agamas duties) and five other elders (aju) of Tahsibaha act as the selection committee. The candidates, after initial pre-selection by Mubaha members in accordance with the usual physical criteria, are brought to the official Kumari agama located on the first floor directly over the baha entrance. The Chakreswor puts small rolls of paper in a ritual bowl (patra) and his wife then gives one to each candidate. The girl who takes the piece with a thunderbolt (vajra) drawn on it becomes the next Kumari - the living manifestation of Vajradevi. The girl selected is then placed beside the old Kumari on her throne or seat (asana) and the Chakreswor transfers the various items of jewelry and other insignia from one to another. He makes offerings of nuts to the old Kumari, then after she has left the seat he does likewise to the new one. Though associated rituals are performed the girl is believed to have become Kumari at the moment the lottery result is made known.

Throughout her tenure of office she is expected to live in the Kumari quarters of the baha. She can play in the courtyard with other children but should never go out of the compound other than to meet her ritual obligations. If her playmates should be in any way disrespectful they may be asked to bow before her and ask her pardon. She must not become impure and should eat neither garlic nor onions. She must also avoid any contact with leather or other impure substances. Like the Royal Kumari, she cannot take medicines whilst still in office. She must always wear her red clothes, Kumari hairstyle, third eye and a pair of gold bracelets. She owns a lot of jewelry but according to Moaven it is mostly in very poor condition.

Each morning she must sit on her throne to receive the same baie offerings from a family member. When she goes to houses for private worship she is either carried on her father's shoulder or on a special travelling throne that is now but rarely used. As the chief Vajracharya Kumari who is the first choice for all important Buddhist pujas, especially tahasinha (see pp 55-56) pandara, chatrisamamath, samyak, and panchadan, the girl is kept fairly busy. Chatrisamamath, which is a puja to the important agama deity Chakra Samvara, is performed annually in every main baha in Kathmandu, and the Mubaha Kumari should attend all those held in the central zone (phui). Her most important external

commitment, however, is to attend mahabali puja on astami of Poush at Tahsibaha. The thakali of Tahsibaha goes to Mubaha to summon her and a Mubaha man carries her through the streets on his shoulder. The puja is performed in a special section of Tahsibaha known as Kumari che. Also on the full-moon of Baisakh and the chala of Dasain the thakalis both of Tahsibaha and Dagubaha come to Mubaha to make formal offerings to Kumari. Dagubaha is located close to Mubaha and is most unusual in that its membership is exclusively Vaidya (physicians in the broad Shrestha category).

The reluctance of Mubaha parents to offer their daughters for the position of Kumari is partly because of the restrictions that the position imposes on the whole family, and partly because the material rewards are confined to small personal offerings. Neither the King nor the state takes any interest in the girl and there is no guthi to provide assistance. The fact that there is at present no living goddess, though certainly regretted by many local residents, does not mean that all those pujas which she used to attend can no longer be performed. Some private clients succeed in persuading the Kwabaha girl to attend their voluntary pujas - others make offerings to the spirit of the goddess whose presence may be represented by a mandapa, her throne or some other emblem sent from Mubaha.

Kwabaha

Kwabaha (Maitripuramahavihara) is the foremost initiatory baha of north Kathmandu and is frequently listed as seniormost for the whole city. Its membership is wholly Vajracharya and the men retain the hereditary right to act as priests (purohit) at two important non-Vajracharya centres - the Sakya baha called Sighabaha (or Katesimbhu) and the Pradhan baha called Bhagawan Baha or Thambahi (Vikramasilmahavihara). The Kwabaha Kumari, though selected from amongst the Vajracharya girls of Kwabaha, is in many ways more closely associated with Bhagawan Baha. The Pradhans of this imposing and most unusual baha maintain a separate three-tiered pagoda-type temple (plate 19) for the exclusive use of Kumari who comes here to be worshipped four times each year. The arrangement is in many respects reminiscent of that which holds at the old Malla palaces, and in fact the Pradhans of this baha claim that they are the descendants of a legendary merchant called Singha Sartha Bahu (Kesar Lal, 1971, 37-40) who became Raja of Thamel locality in the late 11th century (Wright, 1955, 167). Even today Thamel is separated from the rest of Newar Kathmandu by Rana palaces. Furthermore, Bhagawan Baha stands in a large compound with attractive gardens and cloisters which suggest something of a palace environment.

The Pradhans are one of a group of castes collectively known as Chautaria (or Ghatharia) - the others are the Malla, Rajbhandari, Joshi, Acahu, Amatya and Munshi. The presumed basis of their inter-relationship is that in pre-Gorkha times they were all connected with the palace and

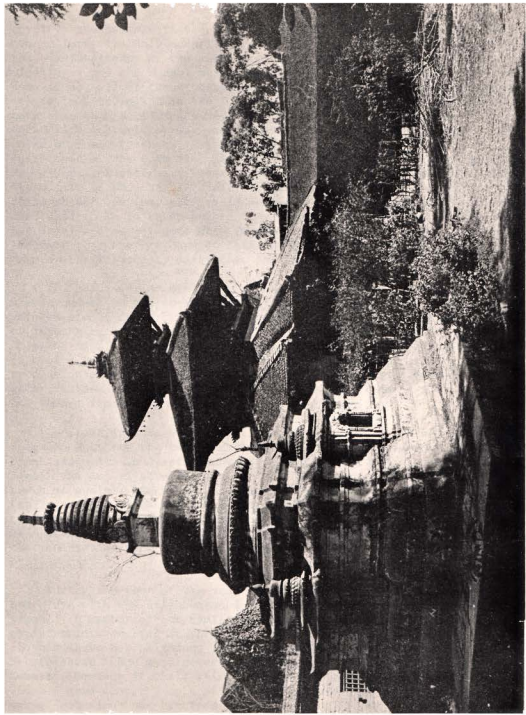


Plate 19. Kumari temple in the courtyard of Bhagawan Daba, Thamel.

royalty; the Malla were the Kings, the Pradhans were executioners and counsellors, the Rajbhandari were storekeepers, the Joshi were astrologers, the Acahju priests of the royal temples, the Amatya were secretaries or ministers, and the Munshi were clerks or scribes. It is also likely that some if not all of these castes are further connected through a common origin in Simraongadh in the Terai. Both Wright's and Hasrat's Vamsavalis note that when Hari Singha Deva came from Simraongadh to Bhadgaon in the early 14th century, he was accompanied by seven castes, and still today three of them, Pradhans, Rajbhandaris and Acahju, state that their forebears came either with Hari Singha Deva or the earlier Karnatic prince Nanya Deva. Furthermore, four of the castes are related through Taleju - the Mallas worship her as their tutelary deity, the Rajbhandaris act as cooks at her temples, and Acahju are her priests in Kathmandu and Bhadgaon (and used to be in Patan before they were ousted by the Deo-Brahmans) and the Joshi are astrologers with important hereditary duties at her temples. The fact that the Pradhans of Bhagawan Baha worship her in her virginal form as their tutelary deity must be understood as part of the same pattern.

The Pradhans, as members of a caste with a purely secular junction, are dependent on the co-operation of the Buddhist priestly castes in the maintenance of their baha and in the worship of its deities. The thakali of Kwabaha acts as their purohit Vajracharya. His chief duty is to go to Bhagawan Baha daily to worship the agama deity (Singha Sartha Bahu in the form of a Bodhisattva and known simply as Bhagawan Dya or Garu Juju is brought on procession around Thamel locality on Phalgun Parewa (the day after Phalgun full-moon). On each of these occasions he must also go to the Kumari temple and worship an image of the goddess.

The four days on which the living Kwabaha Kumari is brought to Bhagawan Baha are the two solstices (the tenth day of Krishna Paksha in Poush and again in Jyestha) when disi (direction) puja is performed, Dasain and on Gaijatra (the day after the full-moon of the Buddhist holy month of gunla). Each time a musical group, together with members of her family and the Vajracharya purohit, accompanies her on the short journey to Thamel and back again to Kwabaha. I was told that in the past she also used to go to Bhagawan Baha in Sraun to listen to the purohit Vajracharya chanting from the baha's famous gold-lettered copy of the prajnaparamita.

During the rest of the year the girl lives at home with her family. She plays with the neighbourhood children but is not permitted to go to school. A member of her family is supposed to worship her daily though my informants doubted if this is in fact so. She is supposed to wear red clothes, have her hair done in the Kumari style and have the third eye on her forehead. She must never cross the river, and must never meet other Kumaris, because if their third eye saw hers she could die or become ill. She has good though simple silver jewelry, and like all other Kumaris, on formal occasions has her toes painted red.

The present incumbent is aged about six and has been in office for two years. I was told that the girls never stay as Kumari beyond about 12, and that the criteria both of selection and disqualification are the same as at Mubaha. The selection committee consists of the Rajguruju, the thakalis of both Kwabaha and Bhagawan Baha and the annual dyapala of Bhagawan Baha. Usually there is simple agreement as to which is the most suitable candidate, but if the committee should disagree they would employ the lottery system.

The ceremony of installation takes place at Kwabaha with both the old and the new girls present. The old one, wearing all her jewels, sits on her throne with the new one on a mat in front of her. The Vajracharya purohit from Kwabaha transfers supernatural powers from the old to the new. He places a garland of flowers around the neck of the disqualified girl who then removes her jewelry. The ex-Kumari gets up from her throne and the father of the new one places his daughter on it. The old Kumari is dressed in new everyday clothes while the new one is given a new set of red clothes from the funds of the Pradhan guthi. The old one then has her formal hairstyle undone while the new one's is made up. Finally, after the old Kumari and her parents have been feasted the new one is decorated in all her jewelry and she is worshipped by the priest.

She may be worshipped either by going to see her in her family home or by asking her to come to one's own house. Now that she is the only Vajracharya Kumari in Kathmandu she is called upon quite often. In addition to her formal outside commitments at Bhagawan Baha, she is also sometimes asked to attend ceremonies such as group rites de passage or large-scale tantric pujas. On one occasion I observed her attending an ihi ceremony in Kwabaha in which twenty small girls married the bel-fruit. Her mother carried her into the courtyard and placed her on a saucer chair where she sat crosslegged for a few hours observing event. She was fully made up with hair-do, third eye, red clothes, painted toe nails and silver jewelry (plates 20 and 21). Her mother stood beside her and occasionally whispered to her - I noticed her once stop the girl from picking her nose. When proceedings were drawing to a close with everyone making offerings to everyone else most of the adults approached Kumari, touched their foreheads to her feet and dropped a small offering in her bowl. Her mother then carried her away on her shoulder.

4. Minor Local Kumaris

Jyapu Kumari of Kathmandu

There are two main groups of Pradhans in Kathmandu - those of Bhagawan Baha who worship a Vajracharya Kumari, and those of the Itumbaha Kilagar area who worship a Jyapu Kumari. The two groups are closely inter-related, a fact which is expressed in the supposed brother-in-law

relationship between their two great folk heroes - Singha Sartha Bahu of Thamel and Keshachandra of Itumbaha. My Pradhan informant of Itumbaha told me that the King of Thamel used to pay his respects to the King of Itumbaha. Still today after the Holi festival this link is re-enacted by a procession with bands going from Thamel to Itumbaha.

The Pradhans claim that it was they and not the Jyapus who began the Kilagar Kumari. Though the girl is recognised and occasionally worshipped as Kumari by the Jyapus and other residents of Kilagar, she exists primarily in order to fulfil the ritual needs of the Pradhans in their agama worship. The agama, which is called Walima and is reputed to date back to NS 4 (873 A.D.) when the Pradhans lived in Simraongadh, is located in the Kilagar area, and the Jyapus have for a long time assisted the Pradhans in their agama worship. The agama god is simply called Bhagawati and whenever she is worshipped, (about three times a year), the Jyapu Kumari, who is said to be her daughter, must be present. The Pradhans also send offerings to Kumari at each of the following festivals: Mhapuja (the fourth day of Tihar when the self is worshipped and long life is sought from the god of death), Chaitra astami (little Dasain), the last day of Indra jatra, and Gai astami (Bhadra). On each of these occasions at least one male member of each of the six Pradhan lineages must go to her house with offerings and worship her. She also may be invited to attend any important ceremonial event of the Pradhans such as a puberty rite or marriage, at which she must be placed in the seniormost position at the head of a row. Up to about six years ago when my informant became the headman (thakali) of the Itumbaha Pradhans, they themselves used to do daily puja to Kumari on a rotation basis with each in turn discharging the duty for a year. But because most of them are busy men with many outside commitments he changed the arrangement so that today a Jyapu does the puja.

Three Jyapus have the hereditary right to six ropanis of land allotted to them many generations ago by the Pradhans in return for their performance of a number of ritual duties in connection with Walima, Kumari, Gurumapa and graddha. Also on dasami of Dasain these three plus a fourth carry the offerings for Kumari puja, Yogini puja, Bhairavi puja and the sword itself for khadga jatra (see Anderson, 153-4). They go on procession to Taleju, Kilagar, Thamel, Yetkha, Kwohiti, Wola and Tehaha. On the same day the Jyapus carry their Kumari from her house in Kilagar to the Pradhan agama where the hereditary Acahju priests worship her. She is given two sets of clothes at each Dasain, one purchased from the funds of the Pradhans' own Kumari guthi and the other supposedly purchased with central treasury funds. However, the treasury amount has remained unaltered at 6.08 rupees (sixty U.S. cents) so the Pradhans in effect have to purchase both sets.

The three Jyapu guthiars select suitable Kumari candidates on the basis of the usual criteria and then bring them to the Pradhans for final lottery selection by a committee consisting of the Thakali, his wife and their Acahju priest. This must take place on the final tika day of Dasain (dasami), and the choice is confirmed by a Jyapu brandishing a khukri over her head. This is to ensure that when similarly threatened by a leading Jyapu during khadga jatra she will not flinch.

The criteria of disqualification are the same as for other Kumaris with the emphasis placed on a lost tooth or menstruation - the girls seldom exceed ten years of age. The Pradhans like to anticipate disqualification by effecting a replacement before any signs appear. They do this to avoid the possibility of a long period without any Kumari since she can be installed on only one day in the year. If an event that requires Kumari worship takes place while there is no living Kumari they are required to walk barefoot at night to the Indraini temple in a low-caste cremation area near the river. This is a most dangerous and distasteful thing to do and the Pradhans like to avoid this necessity by maintaining Kumari continuity.

The girl lives at home with her parents and for most of the year lives a life that does not differ greatly from that of her fellow Jyapus of the locality. My informant told me that the Pradhans have eased the restrictions in recent years and she is now even permitted to attend school. She must not touch leather and she must wear red clothes and have her hair done in the Kumari style. She need not, however, wear her third eye other than on formal occasions. She plays openly on the streets and in the fields, but is excluded from any exhausting work.

Jyapu Kumaris of Patan

The Deo-Brahmans of Patan are divided into six groups which are referred to both as lineages (kawa) and as castes (jat). As lineages they claim descent from six Brahmins of Kanauj in India who first went to Simraongadh in the terai, and subsequently were invited by the early Mallas to come to Patan to act as their priests. Each lineage is named by reference to the locality in which it maintains its agama and where most of its members still live. As castes the six groups are ranked according to the number of ordinations (dekha) that their male members are entitled to take. Such status variations are not very great, especially between the top five lineages whose members freely interdine and intermarry. The sixth group is somewhat set apart with only an occasional marriage taking place into the superior lineages.



Plate 20. The Kwabaha Kumari attending an ihi ceremony, Kwabaha, November, 1973.



Plate 21. A woman worshipping the Kuabaha Kumari at end of thi ceremony, Nov. 1973



Plate 22. The Jyapu Kumari in Mikhabaha, Patan.

<u>Lineage name</u>	<u>Caste name</u>
1. Bakanimha	Sukula
2. Wala	Pandeya
3. Thabu	Agnihotri
4. Tadalibi	(not known by informant)
5. Nuga (no members left)	-
6. Sonimha	Misra

A senior member of Bakanimha, the largest and highest-ranking of the groups, showed me a written genealogy in which he himself was represented as the 23rd agnatic descendant of the founder Sakti Ram. The genealogy recorded Bidyananda, who was ten generations back from my informant, as having died in NS 837 (AD 1717). This gives an average of about 25 years per generation, a rate which would place Sakti Ram in the mid-14th century, about the time when Hari Singha Deva brought the Taleju cult from Simraongadh to the valley.

Each of these six Deo-Brahman groups maintains its own agama where the initiated male members meet periodically to perform tantric pujas. According to the Hindu tantra every kind of religious performance should begin with the worship of Ganesa and Kumari, and for this reason each of the six groups used to have a living Jyapu Kumari to attend their agama and other group rituals. The girls were chosen from a Jyapu community because the religious law books decree that if a Brahman should worship Kumari she should be of Sudra varna, if a Chettri or Raja (Kshatriya) she should be a Chandal (debased outcaste) and if a Vaishya she should be Brahman.

Today only the Sonimha Deo-Brahmans continue to maintain their Jyapu Kumari, though up to about 60 years ago another was worshipped by the Bakanimha group. No knowledge is retained of when the others, if they ever existed, became defunct. Sonimha, or Solima as it is more commonly called, is a locality in north-west Patan extending roughly from Pimbaha to Patan Dhoka. About 12 Rajopadhya Deo-Brahmans live in the locality and jointly worship at their agama. The thakali of the Kathmandu Pradhans told me that Walima (their agama) and Solima are both very old agama dating back to Simraongadh, and that this is why living Kumaris are still maintained in connection with their rituals.

The Sonimha Deo-Brahmans select their Kumari from a sub-caste of about 30 Jyapu families who live nearby in Mikhabaha and its immediate surroundings. The Deo-Brahman thakali or his representative chooses the girl according to the usual criteria, and after installation in the agama she lives at home with her parents. Her life-style, other than on formal ritual occasions, is very much the same as that of other little Jyapu girls. When I visited the present incumbent in Mikhabaha I found her playing in the courtyard without any kind of make-up, special clothes or

even hair-do. She was aged about five and had been Kumari for some five months. When I asked to take a photo her mother went into the house for three simple and somewhat battered pieces of jewelry made of brass - a headress and two necklaces. Then a clean of the face made the girl ready for her portrait (plate 22).

A member of her family, usually her father, performs a simple daily puja in the morning with rice and flowers. The Deo-Brahman thakali, either alone or accompanied by the thakali of those Joshis who also have their agama at Solima, comes to worship her on the 14th day of the dark half of each month. Her big day is on the 4th of the bright half of Baisakh when many Deo-Brahmans and Jyapus of the locality come to Mikhabaha to make offerings to her. Her principal duty, however, is to go to Solima agama whenever the Deo-Brahmans and Joshis require her presence for Kumari puja, generally after the marriage or initiation (brata bandha) of one of their male members. Sometimes she goes to the agama alone, sometimes accompanied by 11 small friends so that together they constitute a Gana Kumari.

Bakanimha is an area in the vicinity of the famous Purnachandi temple at Punchali. Purnachandi is a form of Durga and the goddess is the ancestral deity (dewali dya) for all Patan Deo-Brahmans. Though they no longer come together for a common dewali puja, each lineage gathers separately at the temple to worship the goddess whenever one of their male members marries or is initiated. The Bakanimha lineage, which consists of about 25 families divided into four sub-lineages, used to have its agama in a large temple in Bolima tol, and as in Solima the local Jyapu population supplied a living Kumari (Mu or 'chief' Kumari) as well as a Gana Kumari for their agama and dewali puja. However, in 1908 A.D. the agama god and other images were stolen from the temple. A few years later they abandoned the custom of living Kumaris and then in 1930 when the temple collapsed in an earthquake they did not rebuild it. My informants attributed all of these calamities to the many quarrels which resulted in the sub-division of the group into four sections.

The Bakanimha Deo-Brahmans have, however, continued to maintain some important components of the Kumari institution. Her throne is still kept in the house of one of their members who lives in Bolima, and whenever they wish to perform Kumari puja they summon the spirit of the goddess to enter a sacred water vessel (kalasa) which is placed on her throne. As with the Solima group they do this whenever they perform dewali puja in connection with a marriage or initiation. On such occasions the Jyapus of the locality also send twelve young children as the Gana Kumari. There is a small building close to the temple ruins at Bolima which is known as Kumari che, and until it partly collapsed in 1972 a Jyapu woman known as the Ma Kumari lived there together with her husband and children. In the past the duty of the Ma Kumari had been to do daily puja to the living Kumari, and even now she and her husband discharge the function to her throne. The position was usually filled by



Plate 23. The Bungamati Kumari in everyday attire

the mother or some other close female relative of the girl, but for the last 60 years it has remained in the family of the woman who held the position at the time of the last incumbent.

Bungamati Kumari

Bungamati is a wholly Newar village of about 700 persons some four miles south-west of Patan. Much of the social life of the settlement centres on Matsyendranath (Karuna Maya or Punga Dyo), the great national deity who spends part of the year in his Bungamati temple and part in Tahbaha in Patan.¹¹ The Bungamati Newars are mostly Buddhist and the dominant castes are the Vajracharya and Sakya who together constitute about a quarter of the population. Seven of the Vajracharya and 24 of the Sakya are known as Panju and it is they who share the many duties associated with Matsyendranath. The seven Panju Vajracharya also provide from amongst their families a living Kumari. But unlike all other Kumaris relatively little stress is placed on selection by reference to ideal criteria. Instead, the position passes preferentially to the oldest of the eligible girls. The current incumbent (plate 23) is aged five and has been in office for about one year. I was told that disqualification follows automatically after a fallen tooth, smallpox, measles or menstruation, and that the girls seldom stay in office for more than about three years. Daily puja is performed by the father or some other member of her family and consists of just a simple offering of rice, flowers and red tika mark. She should be respected by all members of her family and must eat first. She must wear her hairstyle at all times but otherwise may live the same life as any other young girl of her age. The great majority of Bungamati residents of all castes as well as others from surrounding settlements, including some Chetri and Brahmans, come to make offerings to her after a marriage, a boy's initiation (brata bandha) or first menstruation (bara thebu). Many also come when someone is sick, especially if suffering from haemorrhage.

Both in origin and in contemporary worship the Bungamati Kumari is closely associated with Matsyendranath. She is said to have first come to Nepal as one of the many deities who accompanied Matsyendranath. The main day on which she appears for public worship is the first of Mangsir or Marga (mid-November), the supposed anniversary of the death of Matsyendranath. She is dressed in red clothes and jewelry, has her hair done in the Kumari style and the third eye and red tika on her forehead, and then spends the day sitting on her throne (asana) on a raised though open area beside the entrance to the Bhairava (Hayagriva) temple. Hayagriva is said to be the leader of Patan's four Bhairavas. In more formal Buddhist terms he is a tutelary God of the Amitabha pantheon. He is represented as a fierce god who wears the scalp of a horse on his head and carries chains or fetters. Matsyendranath's temple is only a few yards away in the same square and his image is also taken to the Bhairava

temple. The Vajracharya Panjus first worship Matsyendranath and Bhairava and then offer meat, two loaves of bread and flattened rice to Kumari. For the rest of the day offerings are made by the general population of Bungamati.

Twenty-two days later, on the eighth day of the dark half of Mangsir, the Gana Kumari are brought to Hayagriva's temple where they are feasted and worshipped. The Gana Kumaris, who often do not exceed seven or eight in number, are selected from any of the Vajracharya or Sakya Panju families.

The principal Kumari makes a public appearance on two other days, both in honour of Matsyendranath. The first occurs at about the time of the winter solstice when the Panjus take his image out of the Bungamati temple and carry him to his temple in Patan. The second is some six or seven months later on the fourth day after the god's return to Bungamati. On this occasion large crowds come from Patan and Kathmandu to see that Matsyendranath has been reinstalled safely in his temple. Kumari, again clad in all her regalia, sits on her throne outside Hayagriva's temple to watch events and to receive the offerings of her admirers.

Every twelfth year when Matsyendranath is dragged all the way to Patan and back again in his huge chariot the Bungamati Kumari accompanies him north as far as the Nakhu river where he is met by the Patan Kumari.

Chabahi Kumari

Chabahi is a largely Newar settlement of about 2,000 persons three miles north-east of central Kathmandu and just west of the famous stupa called Bodhnath. It stands on the site of an ancient town called Kirtipunya or Devapatan which was once a major centre ruled by a King. There are the remains of many monasteries (*viharas*) in the vicinity, including one called Mejbaha on the way to Bodhnath and another called Otubaha in the centre of town. By far the most famous monument at Chabahi is a large chaitya called Dando ('lump of money') which according to the Buddhist chronicles was built by Charumati, the daughter of the great Indian Emperor Asoka. She is said to have accompanied her father to Nepal but decided to remain and marry a prince called Devapala. Wright's chronicle also records that when she grew old she built a monastery called Charumati Bihar and retired there as a nun. The chronicler notes that the monastery still exists at Chabahi just north of Devapatan. When I visited it, however, some senior members assured me that although it is known as Charumati Bahi (or more commonly in the abbreviated form of Chabahi), its true Sanskrit name is *Suvarnapurnamahavihara* and it was built as late as NS 850 (1730 AD) by Ganga Maharani, a beautiful Sakya girl of Kathmandu who became queen of Devapatan.



Plate 24. The Chabahi Kumari with her parents

The bahi, which is in excellent condition with no modern additions, is located about 70 yards west of Dando chaitya. It has about 80 initiated male members and as with all bahis they are Sakya without any Vajracharya. The bahi maintains its own living Kumari who is selected from amongst the daughters of male members. About seven to ten girls usually offer themselves and provided they all meet the usual physical requirements of good skin, no loss of teeth and are pre-menstrual, they are brought before the main bahi god, a four-foot standing Padmapani also referred to as Karuna Maya, for final selection by lottery. A young girl takes pieces of paper from a bowl and hands them to each candidate. The girl who gets the paper with 'yes' written on it becomes the next Kumari - she has been chosen by Padmapani. She is installed in office in a ceremony performed in her own room or shrine in the bahi which is on the first floor balcony just to the left of the area directly over Padmapani's shrine. Because all of the bahi's members are of Sakya caste they employ as their purohit Vajracharya a member of Makambaha in Kathmandu - and it is he who officiates at the Kumari installation ceremony.

The present Kumari is about five years old and has been in office for just seven months. The previous incumbent was Kumari for about two years from five to seven, and the one before that for a longer period from just under one to about nine. The girls live with their families and other than when required for ritual purposes live fairly normal lives. When I visited the girl at her home she was playing in the garden with friends, but was wearing red clothes. When I explained my interest her parents immediately insisted that I photograph her in her full regalia (plate 24). An 11 year old girl, the one who had been Kumari for a long spell some years ago, took the dirty goddess to a tub of water, scrubbed her face and then proceeded to do her hair in the Kumari style (plate 25). Meanwhile her father went over to Chabahi to get her jewelry and decorations from a storeroom. They were quite a good set of heavy silver items including head-dress, taya, necklaces, bracelets and earrings. Her father carefully painted her eyes and then her forehead with the usual third eye and sat her in a saucer chair for the portrait.

Some rich men of Kathmandu and Patan come to worship her privately, though only one such client had come in the previous year. Local people of all castes and ethnic groups worship her after marriages, initiations and other important domestic rituals. There are four major annual events for which she must don all her insignia for formal worshipping:

- 1 & 2 Like both the royal and the Kwabaha Kumaris she is taken to Chabahi agama for disi puja on both the winter and summer solstices (the 10th of Poush and the 10th of Jyestha). The five aju (seniormost elders) of Chabahi together with the Makambaha purohit worship the agama god and make offerings to Kumari.

- 3 On the 3rd day of Baisakh, known as Akshaya Tritiya, she is brought to the bahi where she is worshipped by the ajus and the purohit. Akshaya Tritiya is a festival during which people offer one another jagari mixed with water.
- 4 On the eighth day of the light lunar fortnight in the holy month of Gunla, Buddhists perform pancha dana, the ceremony of five offerings. Five kinds of food (unhusked and polished rice, lentil seeds, wheat and salt) are offered to the begging monks - Sakyas and Vajracharyas who so choose to represent themselves. The beggars, together with Kumari, line up in the bahi to receive their alms.

5. Maternal and Beautiful Virgin

Taleju Bhavani

In all of the forms in which Kumari is worshipped today there is a recurrent enigma of fundamental importance: by name and in many of her attributes she is a young virgin, yet in other respects is a sexually mature mother-goddess. Earlier I noted how the royal Sakya Kumaris are believed to be living representations of Taleju Bhavani. In most versions of the dice game Taleju is portrayed as very beautiful and the King as desirous of possessing her sexually. It is indeed because of this that Taleju decides to leave the palace and maintain a more remote and formal relationship with the King as a young girl of Sakya Caste. The identification of the two goddesses is also apparent in the important rites performed in the Taleju temple when a new Kumari is installed in office.

Taleju herself is commonly equated with Durga in her role as protectress of the state - initially of Ram Chandra's kingdom of Ayodhya, then of the Karnatic princes of Simraongadh, and finally of the Mallas and Shahas of Nepal. The link between the three goddesses is of particular interest because in addition to the contrast between immature virgin (Kumari) and sexually mature woman (Taleju and Durga) there is the distinction between mild (Taleju) and fierce (Durga). When Kumari is directly represented as Durga, as on the carved tympanums of her house in Basantapur, she is the gentle young virgin and also the terrifyingly mature woman who rides on a tiger and kills male demons. All of these Hindu goddesses are thought of as contrasting forms of the single Devi or Mahadevi who is the Sakti of Siva. I am not certain of Taleju's position in India, though it is certain that wherever she is recognised she is worshipped as a protective mother deity. There is a small town called Tuljapur in Hyderabad state which used to contain a shrine to Bhavani (Parvati) which was much revered by the Bhosle family of the Maratha dynasty. Sivaji, their most famous monarch, built a new temple to Tulja Devi at Pratapgad in AD 1658-9. The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (ii, 3476) also notes that Tuljadevi is worshipped by the Banjara,



Plate 25. The Chabahi Kumari

wandering grain-carriers of the Deccan. The link between the goddess and grain is further confirmed by Sastri (1916, 220) who notes that Tulaja-Bhavani "like Annapurna holds in one hand a vessel of delicious food and in another a spoon for distributing the same". Annapurna is the deity who in Kathmandu presides over the grain market in Asan. Thurston (1909: 393) at the end of his entry on the Brahmins of south India, refers to Desasthas, Marathi-speaking Brahmins who worship Ambabhavani or Tuljabhavani. The appearance of the name Amba is of particular interest for it not only makes the maternal nature of the goddess quite explicit (Amba literally means 'mother'), but also establishes an independent link to Kumari. That this is so is evident in Woodroffe's (1913:110) translation of verse 13 of a hymn to Ambika:

"Who art attended by fowl and peacock,
O faultless one!
Who holdest a sakti-weapon,
And existeth in the form of Kaumari -
Narayani, all reverence to Thee."

Kaumari - the mother-goddess

Kaumari, in the literal sense, simply means 'pertaining to or concerning Kumari', though in fact the name is commonly used to refer to one of the matris or matrikas, the 'divine mothers'. These are usually represented as the female energies or counterparts of the great Hindu gods, and in Nepal they are given as a set of eight (Asta Matrika) or nine (Nava Durga). In each of the three capital cities their shrines are of great importance. They are worshipped most especially during Dasain when they are regarded as fearsome destroyers of demons. The great gods, in order to overcome the demons, take the form of Bhairavas and their saktis become the Bhairavis or Matrikas. This is, of course, a way of reducing the classical Aryan gods to forms of Siva, for Bhairava is the terrible and destructive aspect of this god. The following list was given to me by a Vajracharya informant of Patan who is responsible for organising the Asta Matrika dance at Dasain.

<u>Sakti</u>	<u>Great God</u>	<u>Bhairava form</u>
1. Brahmani (yellow)	Brahma	Asitanga Bhairava
2. Varahi (red)	Varaha or Mahakala	Prachanda Bhairava
3. Indrani (Aindra) (orange)	Indra	Ruruk Bhairava
4. Rudrani (white)	Rudra or Mahadeva	Kalanka Bhairava
5. Kaumari (red)	Agni	Krodhaka Bhairava
6. Vaishnavi (green)	Vishnu	Unamatta Bhairava
7. Chamunda (red)	Kuvera	Kapala Bhairava
8. Mahalakshmi (red)	Yamaraj	Samhara Bhairava

When Ugrachandi is added they become the Nava Durga.

The living Kumari and the Matrika Kaumari, though very different as the young, beautiful and calm virgin, and the mature, fierce and sometimes ugly mother, are nevertheless formally identified as the same goddess. That this is so is evident in that in both forms their colour is blood red, their mount is the peacock and their flower is the hibiscus. Furthermore, Agni, the consort of Kaumari is referred to as Kumara in the Brahmanas. Kumara is the chaste adolescent who forever remains young and single - and as such is the male counterpart to Kumari the perpetual maiden. As Skanda, 'the spurt of semen', he is sometimes represented as the son of Agni and Ganga, though in other versions he is said to be conceived from Siva's seed without the intervention of a woman (Dowson, 152). Danielou (1964:28) gives Skanda as the consort of Kaumari in his list of the Sapta Matrika. Another common name of the same god is Kartikeya, the god of war and the planet Mars, who is often depicted as riding on a peacock with Kaumari as his consort. The link between Kaumari and Kumari is also evident during the annual festival of the royal Kumari of Kathmandu when she is accompanied by two boys one of whom is Chanda Bhairava, a form of Kumara, and the other is Ganesa. Kumara and Ganesa are here connected as half-brothers, the sons of Mahadeva (Siva) from Ganga and Parvati respectively.

Sastri (1916:229) writing of south India, indicated a similar identification between the virgin and the mother when he noted that 'The Saptamatrikas of the Tantras are also counted among village deities and are, perhaps, the same as the "seven Kanniyamar (unmarried girls" or the "seven sisters".'

The underlying sexuality and maternity of the virgin goddess is paralleled amongst the Newars by the role of Kumara as the external bachelor who is also the ideal husband. As Suvarna Kumara he is the golden bachelor prince to whom all girls of Vajracharya and Sakya castes are married at about six or seven in the *ih*i or bel-fruit ceremony. One of my informants, a Deo-Brahman of Patan, told me that both Kumari and Kumara have the peacock as their mount (*vahana*) because this unique bird reproduces itself without sexual intercourse. Peahens gather around the peacock who then fertilises their eggs with his teardrops.

The term 'kumari' literally means 'virgin girl' in the sense of pure or unused or undefiled. Though marriage is usually understood to preclude such a condition, the fact that it need not necessarily do so is evident in at least three contexts: the goddess Kaumari is commonly represented as having a male consort, the high incidence of child marriage amongst orthodox Hindus ensures that brides remain virgins for some years, and a separate term, *kanya*, is used to refer to a young girl ready to be given away in marriage (as in the marriage rite, known as *kanyadana*). The ever-increasing importance of child marriage in Hinduism has led to a proliferation of terms for young girls at different stages of their

physical development. In most lists kanya is used to refer to a young pre-menstrual girl of about eight to ten, rajasvala (literally 'red appearing') to a girl just beginning her first menses and aged about ten or eleven, rohini to a 'red' girl of about twelve, and kumari to a thirteen year old girl (Pandey, 1969:188 and Walker, 1968:434).

The designation of Kumari as a post-menstrual girl is most interesting in view of the emphasis placed on menstruation as a certain sign for the disqualification of the Newar living Kumaris. In overt terms the living Kumari is first and foremost a pre-menstrual girl, yet perhaps in some inner sense that parallels the underlying sexuality and maturity we have seen in other contexts, she is really post-menstrual. The fact that her favourite colour in clothes, tika mark and flower is red, supports such a view. The occasional appearance of a living Kumari of a clearly post-menstrual age, as with the present Patan Kumari and a royal Kumari of some twenty years ago, may also indicate an underlying ambivalence as to the goddess' true nature. The taya, an essential item of jewelry worn by a girl at her marriage ceremony is often worn by the living Kumari.

The Royal Academy of Nepal recently produced a ballet called "Sweta Kali's daughter (Kumari)" in which the goddess' beauty and sexual maturity are both explicit and central to the drama. Sweta Kali is represented as the eldest of a group of mother, or more correctly grandmother, goddesses called Ajima (aji literally means 'grandmother' or 'midwife'). They are, like all Kalis, fierce and ugly and they are chiefly worshipped in connection with smallpox and infants' diseases. The author of the ballet portrays them as the defenders of Kathmandu from demons and enemies. In this respect, and also because they are seven in number, they display similarities to the Tantric Matrikas. The representation of Kumari as a daughter of Sweta Kali, though unusual, is not unique. Most of my informants rejected such a relationship as impossible on the grounds that Kumari, like her male counterpart Kumara, had no mother; others pointed to corroborating evidence. For example, at Balaju Park north of Kathmandu there is a small temple dedicated to Pyatho Ajima and she is represented as a mature female with an infant called Kumari suckling at her breast.

Bala Kumari

In addition to the living Kumari and the Matrika Kaumari, the virgin goddess is worshipped in the forms of Bala Kumari and Pancha Kumari. The Bala Kumari, of which there are four corresponding to the four cardinal directions, are images enshrined in pagoda-type temples at Thimi (east), Patan (south), Mayati (west) and Mangalpura (north). In this version of the goddess the immature/mature conjunction is taken even further in that though bala literally means 'child', the image is of a beautiful and mature woman sitting astride her peacock mount.

The Bala Kumari of Patan is enshrined in a three-tiered temple about half a mile east of the town (see Bernier, 1970:104-7 for detailed description). According to one story it was built in honour of the goddess after she had defended the valley by spreading cholera amongst invading Tibetans. Though the Tibetans were said to be led by Tsongkhapa (early 14th century), an inscription in the building records its foundation in the year NS 742 (1622 AD). Nearby a small cluster of houses is occupied by a mixed group of Salmi, Mahajan and Shrestha, with the first acting as dyapala.

The temple is notorious as a place to which sorcerers (bokshi) from all over the valley are believed to come at night in order to acquire the power (siddhi) necessary to make their invocations or prayers (mantras) powerful and effective. Further evidence of the connection between Kumari and sorcerers can be found at Hari Siddhi, a small Newar village about four miles south of Patan. The presiding goddess, Hari Siddhi, is a triple deity consisting of the union of Kumari, Bhairavi, and Hari Siddhi. All there are yoginis and they must be propitiated with blood sacrifices. A number of the men of this village, and also a few from the neighbouring settlements of Thecho and Kona, are known as Jalami, and as such they always wear strange clothes that are in many ways like those of women, the main item being a one-piece pyjama-type outfit with a top like a woman's blouse. They never cut their hair and keep it in a topknot like a woman's, and sometimes they also wear a woman's shawl known as khasto. Each year the Jalami stage a dance (Jala pyakho) on Phalgun full-moon which is famous throughout the valley. The dancers take the parts of angry goddesses with Kumari as the group leader. Once every 12 years the troupe travels all over the valley and wherever they go they must be given as much beer as they want. They are treated with respect and apprehension for it is said that every twelfth year they bespell a victim, preferably a young pre-menstrual girl, in order to prepare her for sacrifice to Hari Siddhi the following year. They keep her in the jungle where she is carefully trained and instructed in secret Tantric rituals. After the sacrifice her body is dried in some secret manner so that it is reduced to a fine powder called maha dhup. The Jalami sell the powder at a high price for it supposedly acts as a powerful substance in sorcery and as protection against devils. My informants, though convinced of the truth of the tale, nevertheless suspected that victims are on the decline for fewer people seem to disappear in mysterious circumstances during the wanderings of the Jalami than used to be the case!

By far the most famous Bala Kumari is the one at Thimi. Unlike the Patan goddess who is located outside the town, has low-caste attendants and is the haunt of sorcerers, the Thimi Kumari occupies an imposing temple in the central square, has Acahju as her priests and as presiding mother goddess is foremost amongst the town's deities. The image is said to have come to Thimi from Tashi, an old Newar town in the south of the valley not far from Hari Siddhi. According to the story, Bala Kumari was

the lineage deity (kul devata) of a Tashi family in which there was a daughter but no son. When the girl's parents died she decided to carry the goddess to her husband's house in Bhadgaon, but by the time she reached Thimi the cocks were beginning to crow so she sat down to take a rest. When she decided to continue her journey she found that the goddess was now too heavy to lift. Kumari spoke to her saying that she wished to remain where she was.

The Acahju do puja to Bala Kumari on each 14th day (chare) before the full-moon, and on each full-moon. On the Phalgun full-moon the goddess (with accompanying bands and followers) is taken to visit Changu Narayan at his mountaintop temple some miles away. (This god also goes to Kathmandu once each year where he meets the Royal Kumari at Hanuman Dhoka.) Her annual festival (jatra) takes place on the Baisakh full-moon (mid-April) and is famous throughout the valley as one of the chief New Year festivities. Throughout New Year's Day crowds of musicians and worshippers come to her temple with offerings of all kinds, but especially of scarlet ceremonial powder. They continue to come during the night and hundreds hold aloft burning ceremonial oil torches. Bala Kumari's own torch is a fine four-wicked structure which must be kept alight throughout the festival, for if it should go out the King and nation would suffer some hardship. Anderson (47) notes that "it is believed that the tremendous accumulated heat from the massed flames will drive the winter away and hasten the advent of crop-nourishing warm summer days".

The second day of the festival is the most spectacular with huge crowds coming from each of the three capital cities. Early in the morning teams of men gather in each of the 32 divisions (tol) to take the resident deities from their temples and carry them in procession in ceremonial palanquins (khat). With frenzied excitement mounting throughout the town as the teams rush here and there with onlookers throwing handfuls of orange-red powder over the gods, temples, themselves and everything else, they finally converge on Bala Kumari's square where they swirl madly around her temple. A short while later there is a dramatic moment when Ganesa arrives with hundreds of followers from the neighbouring village of Nagadesh. The local deities seem to welcome him, attack him and then to delay his departure back home. When he finally makes his escape the local khats then try to stop Bala Kumari from entering the old Taleju temple, for when she succeeds the khat procession is over. It is said that an old palace once stood in the vicinity of the Taleju temple so once again it seems that there was a close connection between royalty, Taleju and Kumari.

Throughout the rest of the day individuals and groups bring chickens and goats to sacrifice to Bala Kumari in her temple. I was told that in the past there used to be a human sacrifice, but that it is now represented by the killing of a black goat. Just outside the temple there is a tall

pole with a beautifully carved peacock on top. An Acahju priest used to throw a handful of rice to the bird who then left his perch to seek out the sacrificial victim. Today the Acahju selects the goat the day before the sacrifice and it is then brought like a king to the temple in a procession with a coloured cloth on which to walk. The meat of the goat is handed out as prasad to all those who come to worship the goddess during the rest of the day. It is not eaten but instead kept as a medicine supposedly effective in combating a deadly child's illness (aisachagu) in which gastro-enteritis succeeds a long period of crying and refusal to eat. Offerings made to Bala Kumari are thought to be efficacious in treating children's diseases, especially those that involve discharge (diarrhoea, eye sore, sepsis or nose-bleeding).

The Pancha Kumari

The Pancha Kumari, though sometimes located in temples, are more often small and inconspicuous shrines. A Newar Brahman gave me the following as the names of the Pancha Kumari: Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita, Tara and Mandodari. Ahalya figures in the Ramayana as the chaste wife of Rishi Gautama who was raped by Indra; Draupadi is the dark and beautiful wife of the five Pandu princes who is also known as Nita-yauvani, 'the ever-young' (Dowson, 94-7); Sita is the famous wife of Rama; Tara is the wife of Brihaspati (Dowson, 63); and Mandodari is Ravana's favourite wife and mother of Indrajit (Dowson, 198). They are all beautiful and mature women; only Ahalya is represented in a chaste form .

The sets of five stones that are called the Pancha Kumari are also said to be pitha. A pitha-sthana, literally 'place of a seat' is one of those 64 places where, according to the Tantras, the limbs of Sati fell as she rotted on the shoulder of her husband Siva. Some pithas, like Kalighat in Calcutta or Guheshwari in Kathmandu, are famous shrines, others are inconspicuous and only known to a few local residents. Some well-known Kathmandu Pancha Kumari pithas can be found at Kamal Pokhari, near Asan Tol on the way to Indra Chowk, and on the Kings' Road.

Whenever Kumari puja is performed, offerings should also be made to the Pancha Kumari. They are often represented as five girl-friends of the main Kumari and in some pujas, as in Kumari yag ratripuja, five pre-menstrual girls are selected to represent the Pancha Kumari. Indeed, whenever Kumari, especially in her living form, is worshipped in a Tantric ritual, extra merit is gained if the Pancha Kumari are also represented by living girls. Sometimes the five virgins appear in marriage ceremonies as girl-friends of the bride. Also during Dasain some families do puja to the Pancha Kumari in their living form. In recent years the state has financed the appearance of five girls known as the Pancha Kumari whenever the King or a foreign head of state arrives at Kathmandu airport. The teenage girls welcome the dignitaries by placing flower garlands around their necks.

One informant, a learned Newar Buddhist related the Pancha Kumari to a five-fold division that is fundamental to both Buddhism and Hinduism. In the Hindu Tantra the divisions are called Kula ('family') and each has its own colour which represents one of the five elements. In certain pujas five young girls take the part of the Pancha Kula and they are said to symbolise the five sensitive organs which lead to the five defilements (hatred, lust, envy, delusion and malicious slander). The five girls are used in the ritual to generate awareness based on sensations so that the participants learn to exercise the control and restraint that leads to happiness - as in holding back the ejaculation of semen. He gave the names of the Pancha Kula as Ragavajri, Dvesavajri, Irsyavajri, Mohavajri, and Pisunavajri who correspond to the five sakti of the Dhyani Buddhas.

The same informant also referred to a secret Tantric ritual in which nine girls represent the Nava Kanya. The girls should be selected from nine different occupational groups covering a wide range of castes: Nati - daughters of dancers; Kapalini (Kusali) - daughters of untouchable painters; Veshya - daughters of unmarried women, usually prostitutes; Rajaki - daughters of washermen; Naya Kangana - daughters of actresses; Brahmani - daughters of Brahmins; Sudra Kanya - daughters of Sudra; Gopal Kanya - daughters of cowherds; Malaka Kanya - daughters of gardeners. The aim of the ritual is to worship the girls with a pure mind and thereby gain enlightenment in this life. It is also said that if a King should worship them perfect order will prevail throughout his kingdom.

The inner and outer Kumari

A number of informants, both Hindu and Buddhist, stressed the importance of the distinction between guhya and bahira. Guyha refers to all that is inner or secret while bahira connotes things that are outer or open. The dichotomy is fundamental not only to all forms of Tantricism but to the very fabric of Newar social life. Group membership is commonly defined by ritual initiation and social boundaries are maintained by secrecy and closure. As the individual progresses from initiation to initiation he not only advances upwards on the social ladder but gains access to ever increasingly effective or powerful religious practices, doctrines and icons.

For a Newar Buddhist the most basic inner/outer dichotomy is that between tantric and non-tantric. Non-tantric religious practices are those that are available without initiation and in doctrinal terms may be equated with Srawakayana or Hinayana Buddhism. Tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism is characterised by secrecy and initiation and it's advocates teach a doctrine of emancipation achieved through a positive cultivation of experience and sensation. The difference between the two religions is most apparent in their attitudes towards sex. Whereas orthodox non-Tantric Buddhists stress the importance of celibacy and monasticism, the followers of Vajrayana worship the ecstatic union of male and female (mahasukha).

The inner/outer distinction is relative, not absolute, and hence there are gradations as regards the true identity of Kumari. The most superficial or outer forms are as Kaumari in the Asta Matrika, as Bala Kumari and as Pancha Kumari. In each of these forms she is openly available for worship by all, and will accept meat, blood and wine offerings. Furthermore, though physically mature little stress is placed on her sexual role. At the next two levels, which from the Buddhist point of view correspond to the Mahayana and Vajrayana doctrines, Kumari though overtly a young and virginal maiden, is in her innermost being the female principle (prajna) in a pre-eminently sexual form. For the Mahayana Buddhist prajna, which connotes "wisdom", is worshipped in two forms; as the sacred book Prajnaparamita, and as the sexual partner of the Dhyani Buddhas. At this level, the 'true' Kumari is especially identified with Tara, the consort of Amoghasiddhi. This goddess ("The Saviouress") is either white or green in colour and of calm disposition. Finally, for the fully-initiated Vajrayanist, that is to say, for the one who has gained the right to participate in the secret agama ritual, Kumari is worshipped as prajna in the form of a yogini (plates 26 and 27) or dakini, especially as Vajradevi, the beautiful and red-coloured partner of Chakra Samvara (Heruka). Chakra Samvara is usually depicted in paintings as medium blue with three hideous heads, twelve weapon-bearing arms, surrounded in flames, garlanded with skulls and embracing the naked and ecstatic Vajradevi. Together they are trampling on the corpses of Ali (Mahadeva) and Kali (Parvati) - the symbols of sublimated sexual desire. Vajradevi is often identified with Vajravara (the partner of Mahamaya, another of Heruka's many forms). In the Vajradevi mandala, which is worshipped in major tantric pujas, the goddess is represented as slim, elegant, dancing on one foot, garlanded with skulls and bearing the khatvanga (a thin spear transfixing three skulls). She stands at the centre of two intersecting triangles (sri yantra) with six guardian female deities who are also forms of herself.¹³

A Vajracharya informant gave me the following description of how his mother, assisted by her five married sons together with their wives and children made the great taha sinha puja (also called maha sindura abhiseka or rahasya guhya puja). The woman's husband died when her sons were still young children and she decided to devote all her time and energy to providing each of them with a good education. She also promised that when the last son had finished his education she would perform some pujas. First she did pitha puja - over a period of time the family visited all of the 32 pithas in the valley doing puja at each of them. Then she said, "Good, I am happy and now I want to do taha sinha puja - as a woman I want to do the puja of prajna".

About two weeks before the ceremony was due to take place the brothers sent invitations to all those they needed for the performance - Vajracharya horn-playing musicians, painters of religious pictures, and a group of women helpers. They themselves, helped by their wives and

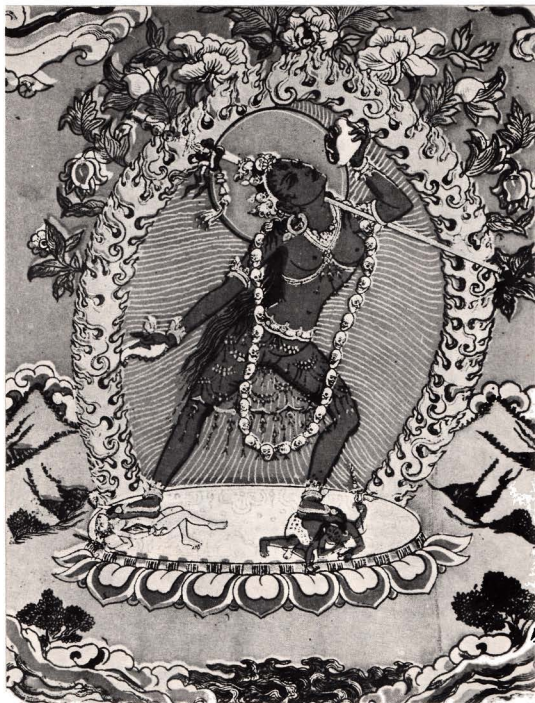


Plate 26. Vajra yogini (red-coloured body)



Plate 27. Khadga yogini (red-coloured body)

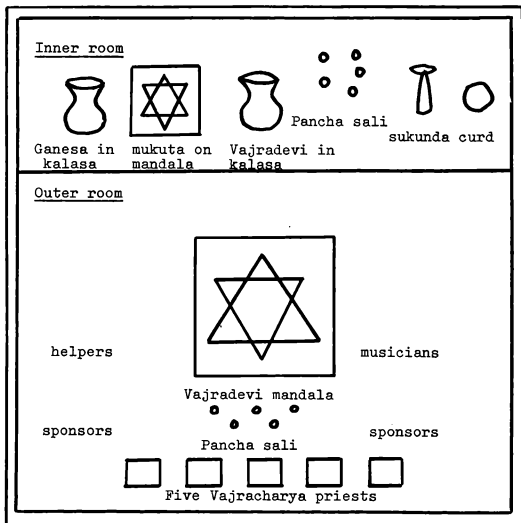


Diagram 2. My informant's diagrammatic representation of the way in which personnel and sacra were arranged for his mother's Taha Sinha puja.

other relatives, spent many days preparing a room at their home. They divided it into an inner (guhya) and an outer (bahira) section (diagram 2) and decorated it with paintings of such high tantric deities as Chakra Samvara and Yogamvara. The inner section, which could be entered only by those who had taken their dekha (Allen, 1973), was for the performance of the most secret tantric rituals.

The day before the big puja a woman, carrying a painted clay vessel (kalasa) and accompanied by a priest, walked to the nearest Ganesa temple, in this case close to Matsyendranath Baha. The priest, with the aid of a brief ritual, transferred the spirit of Ganesa into the pot, and the woman carried it back to the inner room. At the same time another couple went to the nearby Vajracharya Kumari of Mubaha. They brought a simple tray of offerings, the kind that worshippers bring daily to temples, and asked the goddess if she would attend their taha sinha puja the following day. Kumari indicated her assent by accepting the offerings and by permitting her mother to give the couple prasad.

The senior Vajracharya priest entered the inner room where he performed the important ritual of summoning the spirit of Vajradevi into a kalasa. He then proceeded, with the aid of assistants, to perform the routine guru mandala and samadhi pujas, followed by the summoning of the Dasa Krodha or Lokapala - the ten Bhairava male guardian deities. Small wooden pegs with carved and painted Bhairava heads were planted in the ground around the puja room. Only one important preparatory act now remained - the drawing of the Vajradevi mandala in the outer room. This was done by my informant, but only after the senior priest had performed the requisite puja on his hand. The mandala, which was very large, was painted on a raised plaster-covered platform in the centre of the room so that everyone could see it. The basis of the mandala was the sri yantra - a pair of intersecting triangles which together represent upaya/prajna.

The following morning the senior priest, with four assistants, began proceedings by chanting the whole of the Varahi Tantra while sitting in front of the Vajradevi mandala. After the ritual 'opening' of the mandala some men went to Mubaha to summon the Vajracharya Kumari. Meanwhile the mother, together with her five sons and the five priests, went to the gate of the compound where they welcomed the goddess with trays of offerings, burning lamps, vessels of water, rolls of red cloth and other gifts. Her father carried her into the outer room and placed her cross-legged at the exact centre of the Vajradevi mandala. From that moment until the end of the puja some five hours later Kumari was Vajradevi.

The priests retired to the inner room where they worshipped a beautiful metal crown (mukut) placed on another and smaller Vajradevi mandala. The senior priest then carried the mukut to the outer room and after worshipping it on Kumari's head he placed it briefly on the head of each member of the sponsoring family. My informant described this as

the most excellent and pleasing form of prasad possible from Vajradevi/Kumari.

A woman now offered Kumari the pancha sali, a jug containing five kinds of rice-wine, while a man offered a tray containing five kinds of meat. After she took a little of each they were also passed around to the members of the worshipping family. Finally, she was offered a tray containing 84 different varieties of food, and this too was passed on to the worshippers.

After the puja was ended Kumari's father carried her home with her worshippers following, and when they reached Mubaha they asked her to forgive them for any mistakes, omissions or displeasing features of the puja. My informant stressed it was their duty to discover exactly what pleased and displeased this particular Kumari, and then to ensure that she was fully satisfied. For example, if she should want some particular toy then they must search the market for it.

Another informant gave me the following list of formal signs as to whether a living Kumari is pleased or displeased with the offerings of a worshipper:

1. If she should only rub her hands after eating the worshipper may become ill within a month - and the same applies if she should hesitate to eat.
2. If she should cry or laugh loudly during the time of worship then the worshipper will become seriously ill and possibly even die.
3. If she should both weep and rub her eyes the worshipper will die immediately.
4. If she should have a gloomy face and look to the left and right, then there will be quarrelling in the worshipper's home.
5. If she should take food with her nails only (i.e. pick at her food) the worshipper will lose money.
6. If she should pinch her lips with her nails it indicates that she is not satisfied and that the worshipper should begin again.
7. If she should stick out her tongue it shows that she dislikes the wine and meat offered.
8. If she should yawn it means that she is dissatisfied with the curd and milk.
9. If she should drink without eating it means that the work of the worshipper will go badly.
10. If she should clap her hands the worshipper will have reason to fear the King.
11. If she should do something like beating in a drumming manner with her hands then the worshipper may fear theft in his house.
12. If she should take the food, bite it and then place it on the floor it indicates some impurity in its preparation.

13. If she should look left and right and back and front while eating then the worshipper will have to leave Nepal.
14. If she should drink just a little yet show signs of intoxication then there will be ghosts or evil spirits in the worshipper's house.
15. If she should look at the worshipper's face without eating then some mistake must have been made in the puja.
16. If she should talk without eating the worshipper's spouse will die.
17. If she should weep continuously the worshipper will become incurably ill.
18. If she should kick on the ground or rub her foot on the floor the worshipper will have to leave his home.
19. If she should tremble the worshipper will go to prison - a long tremble indicating a long sentence and a short one a correspondingly short period.
20. If she should look sideways at the worshipper then it shows that she wants the puja repeated.
21. If she should wink without speaking it shows that she is only half-satisfied.
22. If she should keep her head bowed down and does not speak then she is not fully satisfied.
23. If she should turn her back towards the worshipper then some dirt or impurity is in the food.
24. If none of the above-mentioned things occur then the worshipper's wish will be satisfied.

A Deo-Brahman attempted to explain the relationship between the various classes of female deity by reference to the idea of progressive power. The one great Devi may be worshipped as a pure young virgin (Kumari), as a sexually mature mother (Kaumari) or as a beautiful killer of demons (Durga). Which of these three is the most powerful is not entirely clear. In one context he stated that the progression is from Kumari to Durga. The mother goddess, immensely powerful killer of demons, must be assuaged with frequent blood-sacrifices. He also said that the life-cycle of each living goddess ideally consists of nine annual stages named as follows: Kumari, Trimurti, Kalyani, Rohini, Kalika, Chandika, Sambhavi, Durga, Subhadra. Though she is aged only two at the beginning and ten at the end, Subhadra is nevertheless the mature mother-goddess who kills demons. It is as Subhadra that the goddess is now said to be Atita Kumari or the real Kumari. But in another context he stated that the mother goddesses are really ex-Kumaris whose power is of a derivative kind. It seems that my informant, in common with most Newars, was here vacillating between two alternative notions of cosmic power - that which is embodied in fierce deities who kill demons and must be kept satiated with the blood of sacrificial victims, and that much more mysterious and calm variety which is available only to advanced practitioners of the contemplative and ritual arts. The two modes of thought may be seen as but one of many examples of a pervasive contrast in Newar religion between a belief in a basic earthy kind of power embodied in such themes as

fertility, sexuality and maternity, and in a more rarified power of an intellectual kind. It is essentially a contrast between the religious beliefs and practices of illiterate peasants and those of learned monks and ascetics. The belief that the true essence of Kumari is Durga may be seen as an attempt to synthesise the two traditions.

When I asked a learned Vajracharya why the Devi should be worshipped as Kumari he gave the following explanation:

"In Vajrayana Buddhism the main aim is to understand what is sex and why it is that in sex we get supreme happiness. Life comes from the clash of opposites - as in the meeting of two vital nerves, in the play of the sun and the moon, and in the union of male and female. In order to understand the idea of the void (sunyata) which results from this union we need prajna, the highest knowledge. But prajna is itself female - or rather, it resides within women. It was Manjusri who first compared prajna with a virgin girl because he realised that it was pure and untouched creativity. In other words, though Kumari is a virgin she is nevertheless potentially creative - she will become the mother goddess."

The central theme in this and in similar statements made by both Vajracharya and Deo-Brahman informants, is that the Devi or goddess is worshipped in her virginal form because as such she represents pure and untouched creativity, not because she is the negation of sexuality and maternity. She is the pure unruptured vessel who nevertheless contains within herself the full potential of creative motherhood.

This somewhat philosophical representation of the essence of Kumari worship is in conformity with the apparent contradiction we noted earlier - the little child presented as a beautiful girl, the two year old infant with a full set of second teeth, the post-menstrual girl who must not have bled, and the mother-goddess (Kaumari) who is both virgin (kumari) and child (bala).

Notes

1/ The research on which this manuscript is based was carried out in Kathmandu valley between September 1973 and January 1974 and in October 1974. During this period my enquiries focussed on the worship of Kumari and related goddesses. Background data on Newar social organisation and religion was obtained during a year's visit in 1966/7. I am grateful to Sydney University, the Australian Research Grants Committee the Myer Foundation and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia for having financed the fieldwork. I am indebted to the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, especially to its Dean, Dr. Prayag Raj Sharma, for much encouragement and practical assistance. My thanks are also due to my informants, especially Sri Nhuchhe Bahadur Bajracharya, Sri Manabajra Bajracharya, Sri Asakaji Bajracharya,

Sri Harkha Ratna Dhakwa and Sri Mangalananda. I am particularly grateful to Moaven Niloufar for having so generously given me an early draft of her valuable paper dealing with the Kumari cult.

2/ I know of only one other temple in India dedicated to the virgin goddess - that at Lagpata in the Kangra valley in the North-East Punjab. Rose (1919,1,320) noted that "there is a temple to Kaniya Devi the virgin goddess, whose fair is held on 9th Har. Her Brahman pujari is a Bhojki and bhog is only offered and a lamp lit in the evening." He also made a number of most interesting references to the worship of young unmarried girls as Devis. Thus, "Devi is personified in a girl under ten years of age twice a year and offerings are made to her as if to the goddess on these occasions." (1,327) "The worship of young girls as Devis is always cropping up. Some years ago some enterprising people of the Kapurthala state got two or three young unmarried girls and gave out that they had the power of Devis. The ignorant accepted this belief and worshipped them as goddesses. They visited various parts of the Jullundur District and were looked up to with great reverence everywhere, but as good results did not follow, the worship died out." (1,329). This example comes closest to the Kathmandu cult - the chief difference is that in Kathmandu there is, most probably as a result of royal patronage, greater continuity and elaboration of office.

3/ In many parts of India, but most especially in Bengal and in the Punjab, kumari-puja acquired much popularity amongst the followers of the Tantra. In this ritual the aim is not so much to worship a goddess called Kumari as to utilize the power of young living virgins in order to invoke the spirit of the far from virginal Sakti, Durga or Kali. Bharati (1965, footnote 65,1) gives the following brief description: "Kumari-puja: a lovely and impressive ceremony current all over Bengal and in other parts of India, though with lesser frequency; a girl of twelve, of a Brahmin family, is installed on the pitha like an image of Sakti, and is worshipped accordingly after the 'pratistha' or installation ceremony; in this particular puja, the virgin represents the goddess Saraswati. However, most Brahmans regard the presentation of their daughter for this ceremony as inauspicious."

Macdonald (1903, 41-2) provided somewhat greater detail: The Kumari puja is well known in Calcutta. A householder, intent on thus worshipping the Sakti gets (from outside the membership of his own house) a girl, sets her up as a goddess on a small board or platform surrounded with nine or twelve other females (men not excluded), places a plate under one of her feet, and to that foot makes the usual offerings of flowers, water, etc. A Brahman gentleman who has himself been present at one or more of these Kumari Pujas, tells me that in Calcutta they are not uncommon. In the Yogini Tantra, (53) the great Mahadev says: 'Those gods ever desire a Brahman, a virgin, Sakti, fire, Sruti and a cow for worship on their

sacrificial grounds. If one virgin be worshipped, it will be a second puja. The fruit of virgin worship cannot be told by me. All this universe movable and immovable belongs to Kumari (virgin) and Sakti. If one young damsel be worshipped, seen only in spirit, then actually all the high goddesses will be worshipped without doubt Whatever is given to Kumari and to Sakti never perishes throughout kotis, hundreds and myriads of kalpas (i.e. years innumerable)'. Y.T.42.

A little further on Siva returns to the subject in the words: 'I am unworthy to tell the fruit of Kumari Puja, even with 1,000 kotis (or krores) of tongues and 100 kotis of mouths. Therefore, one should revere Bala as born in every caste; no distinction should be made in Kumari (virgin) worship. By distinguishing caste one escapes not from hell. And the mantra speaker, who is full of doubt, will certainly become a sinner, therefore one should worship her, realizing that she is a Devi, and with great devotion.' Observe that in the above the terms Kumari and Bala are practically interchangeable with virgin and damsel, and worshipped as identical with the goddess. For Kumari is identical with all Vidya (form of Kali) beyond doubt. Bala worshipped alone will be equal to all worship. Should a worshipper by chance get a maiden born in a harlot's family, let him zealously adore her even with all he has - gold, silver, etc.- joyfully. The great siddhi is produced for him ... When endowed with all siddhi (supernatural powers) a man sports Bhairava; assuredly he has entrance into heaven, earth and Patala (hell). On a sudden is produced whatever occurs to his mind. Assuming the aggregate of bodies, he can become allpervading, with his commands unobstructed everywhere, like Purandara (Indra) In time, by Kumari-worship, the worshipper attains Sivahood. Where Kumari is worshipped, that country purifies the earth; the places all round for five crores will be most holy. There one should do Kumari-puja; there breaks forth great light manifest in the land Bharata (India). A king named Visvambhara, sprung from the Chaitra race, worshipped that Kumari (in the person of a girl) born in a harlot's family, named Kanchi, dark-coloured, filled with all auspicious marks. At the time of worship, Kanchi became sparklingly bright; enveloped in the mass of that brightness, the king gained liberation." Y.T.54. (See also abbott, 1932,63 and Chakravarti, 1963, 81).

From the above extract it is clear that the importance that the Nepalese Kings attach to Kumari-puja is by no means unique.

4/ It was only 26 years later, in 1349 A.D. that Shamsuddin Ilyas of Bengal entered the valley and sacked the three capital cities "a disaster which brought about a devotional and iconographic transformation similar to that which had resulted from the Hun attacks against the Gupta empire."

(Singh, 1968, 204-5)

5/ "Bhavani", which literally means 'giver of existence', is one of the many epithets of Sakti or Devi, the consort of Siva. In those areas where, as in the Deccan in central India, she receives special veneration as an independent deity, her attributes are similar to those normally associated with Durga or Kali. Though Durga is commonly represented as beautiful and calm while Kali is ugly and frenzied, the two are alike in that they are both powerful blood-lusting destroyers of demons and enemies. The fearsome Kali aspect of Bhavani is that which was uppermost in the notorious Thuggee cult, while that of beautiful protectress was stressed in her appearance as the tutelary divinity of leading Maratha families. By far the most important of the many Indian Bhavani temples is that at Tuljapur, a small town in Hyderabad. Though an ancient place of pilgrimage, it was not until the Bhosle family began to worship her in the late sixteenth century that she acquired widespread fame. Sivaji, the most famous of the Maratha rulers, regularly consulted with Tulaja Bhavani prior to undertaking any important action, and in 1658 A.D. he built a new and most impressive temple for her at Pratapgad. As in Nepal, the goddess is represented as the main source of the rulers' strength and wisdom; (Kincaid and Parasnis, 113-5, 152, 158-9, 210-1) Indeed, the numerous similarities between the two cults suggest a possible historical connection.

6/ This version is most unusual in its reference to the Bandya as a high caste. Both in other published sources and in the many versions that I myself collected, the goddess chose the Bandya (Sakya) because of their debased occupation.

7/ Fürer Haimendorf (1956,25) reported that the living Kumari must be present at such meetings as a divine witness. My informants denied that this is so. The Gubhajas simply use this room because it is large and the Raj Gubhaju has ready access to it. Meetings are also held in Santipur at Swayambhu.

8/ The following list was given to me by a Vajracharya informant:

1. Feet well-proportioned. 2. Spiralling lines on the soles of the feet. 3. Nails well-proportioned. 4. Long and well-formed toes.
5. Feet and hands like those of a duck (with netlike lines). 6. Feet and hands soft and firm. 7. The body broad at the shoulders and narrow at the waist. 8. Thighs like those of a deer. 9. Small and well recessed sexual organs. 10. Chest like a lion. 11. Well-spread shoulders. 12. Long arms. 13. Pure body. 14. Neck like a conch-shell. 15. Cheeks like lion. 16. Forty teeth. 17. Teeth white and nicely shaped. 18. No gaps between teeth. 19. Tongue small and sensitive. 20. Tongue moist. 21. Voice clear and soft like a duck's. 22. Eyes blue/black. 23. Eyelashes like those of a cow. 24. A beautiful complexion with white lustre. 25. A gold-coloured complexion. 26. Skinpores small and not too open. 27. Hair-whorls stiff and turning to the right. 28. Hair black. 29. Forehead large and well-

proportioned. 30. Head round with cone-shaped top. 31. Body shaped like a banyan tree. 32. Robust body.

9/ A horse, which some say is Taleju's and others Kumari's, is still kept in the Hanuman Dhoka palace, where it is fed daily from government funds and allowed to wander freely in the courtyard. It is taken out annually to accompany Kumari to Ghoda Jatra, when it stands near her viewing platform. It is also worshipped on navami of Dasain by the female palace residents (lakhuni).

10/ As in Kathmandu, the priests in charge of the Patan Taleju temple were traditionally members of the Karmacharya section of the Acahju caste. However, they lost this position when a serious theft of images took place in Mulchowk and the Karmacharya on duty at the time was found guilty of complicity. The Mulpujari are at present members of the Deo-Brahman caste.

11/ For a good detailed account of his cult see Locke, 1973.

12/ Other important agama deities together with their female partners are as follows: Hevajra and Nairatma, Yogamvara and Gyana Dakini, Vajradhara and Vajradhari, Trailokyavijaya Samvara and Trailokya Devi, Mahakala Samvara and Mahakala Devi.

13/ Ugratara yogini (at Bijeswori) - white. Khadga yogini (above Sankhu) - blue. Akash yogini (at Bijeswori) - black. Vidyadhari yogini (Pharping - also known as Vajra yogini) - red. Vajra Vilashini yogini (Phulchowk - also known as Vajra yogini) - red. Vajra yogini (Bijeswori) - red.

Kumari may be identified with any of these yoginis, especially with the red Vajra yoginis (plates 25 and 26).

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